# A CITY WHICH HATH FOUNDATIONS:
# THE RESPONSE OF BLACK CHURCHES TO GENTRIFICATION IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.

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ABSTRACT

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Historic Black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California, are facing the challenges of gentrification. The rapid shift in neighborhood demographics exacerbates the intersectional injustices of housing inequality, racism, and poverty. As cities are shaped by gentrification and lose Black residents, Black persons are separated from the institutions that provide spiritual, social, and cultural uplift. Black churches thereby lose stakeholders in their congregations and the larger community. This project will examine Black Churches in Los Angeles and the role of the Black pastor in responding to gentrification. This project will utilize a liberationist, afro-christian humanist, and reformed theological framework focused on the flourishing of human beings and their communities. Research will be conducted through qualitative interviews with local pastors in the Los Angeles community. Gentrification is a challenge that many Black churches feel ill-equipped to address. Most pastors have resigned themselves to the decline of their congregations while maintaining some form of hope for the future of their communities. Without radical reimaginings of the purposes of local Black churches, gentrification will lead to the closure and erasure of once vibrant Black churches and communities.

**Dedication**

# Acknowledgments

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# CHAPTER ONE

# GENTRIFICATION AS A SOCIAL CRISIS

Gentrification is a contested issue facing metropolitan areas across the world. Touted by its supporters as the renewal and redevelopment of cities, gentrification displaces current residents of cities and negates the values, ideas, and well-being of persons of color. In particular, gentrification poses an issue to the thriving and well-being of Black communities. This chapter focuses on gentrification and its impact on Black Los Angeles. The chapter begins with the beginnings of Los Angeles as a Black city established by Afro-Spaniards and the history of Black persons in Los Angeles. It then explores gentrification as a battle for control of cities and examines the mythologies that are created to justify gentrification. *Forms of Gentrification* then explores the various modalities of gentrification and how they impact their communities. *Gentrification and Los Angeles* and the following section, *Gentrification and Black Los Angeles,* explore the unique particularities of gentrification in Los Angeles and its impact on the Black community. Lastly, this chapter closes with *Whose Neighborhood and Whose Church: Gentrification and the Black Church* and how Black Churches can address gentrification.

## Introducing Black Los Angeles

The City of Angels, El Dorado, La La Land. Los Angeles, California has been a mecca for reinvention, opportunity, and imagination. Los Angeles is also a city of many contradictions. Built on the edge of the Pacific Ocean and surrounded by mountains, Los Angeles was originally settled by the Tongva and Chumash peoples. Afro-Spaniards established the city of Los Angeles

in 1781. In 1793, Francisco Reyes, classified as a mulatto, was elected as mayor or alcalde of Los Angeles.[1] The Afro-Spaniard and later Afro-Mexican presence in Los Angeles remained strong. Still, the development of modern Black Los Angeles began with the slow growth of free and enslaved English-speaking Black persons in the 1840s and 1850s. A multicultural and multiethnic city of cities, Los Angeles is a global crossroads. It has also been a place of personal reinvention, cultural innovation, and religious pluralism, marketed as Eden or, for many African American migrants, as El Dorado. Los Angeles has long represented the promises of economic prosperity, self-fulfillment, and abundance. Early Black migrants in the 1920s and 1930s moved as boosters sold the promises of a beautiful climate, lessened racial tension, and economic opportunity. L.A. represented a promised land for black migrants from Louisiana, Texas, and across the American South who faced severe racialized terror post-reconstruction. It is also a city with a complicated racial history, including racial covenants, sundown towns such as Culver City, the Watts riots of 1965, and the Rodney King riots of 1992. This complex racial narrative presents a city that offered opportunity and promise to its Black citizens. While also reinforcing systemic oppression from police brutality, redlining, racial covenants, lack of access to quality education, and economic resources, and the ghettoization and neglect of particular Black neighborhoods led to the uprisings of 1965 and 1992. Recent tensions continue as recently as the fall of 2022, with racist comments regarding the influence of the Black community in L.A. by Latinx members of the Los Angeles City Council.

The growth of modern Black L.A. began during the late nineteenth century when significant Black migration occurred as racial violence increased following the end of reconstruction. Boosters, Black newspapers, and Black citizens of L.A. characterized as “God’s

[1] Darnell M. Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, *Black Los Angeles American Dreams and Racial Realities*, Democracy and Urban Landscapes. (New York: University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.18574/9780814790922.

Country, Eden, and El-Dorado"[2] Los Angeles has a long and storied history of a vibrant African-American middle and upper-middle-class alongside immense poverty. L.A. has a small Black population only composing 8% of the city.[3] The Black community has an outsized political, cultural, and social influence relative to its small population, ranging from the long and successful mayoralty of Tom Bradley to the recent election of Karen Bass in 2022, and from the influence of the music industry and Black musicians from rap, jazz, gospel, R&B, and soul, to the impact of Black Hollywood actors and musicians. The Black Church in Los Angeles has also played an outsized role in the city and nationally. From the gospel music influence of West Angeles Church of God in Christ and James Cleveland's Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church, Rev. Cecil Chip Murray's activism at First AME Church, Rev. Thomas Kilgores of Second Baptist's influence on the Presidents of the University of Southern California, and the television broadcasts of megachurches such as Crenshaw Christian Center "The Faithdome" and Bishop Noel Jones City of Refuge Church. Black Los Angeles is an amalgamation of Western individualism and Southern tradition.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Central Avenue, South Los Angeles, Watts, Crenshaw, and Inglewood would become home to robust black communities with a vibrant music scene, large churches, and social organizations. The mass migration that occurred during World War II would expand L.A.'s Black population and the 1965 Watts riots would shape L.A. with $40 million in damages, 4,000 arrests, and 34 deaths. [4] During the 1960s, the Black middle class gradually integrated neighborhoods such as Ladera Heights, Windsor

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[2] Douglas. Flamming, *Bound for Freedom Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520940284.
[3] "Impacting Black History: Black People Make up 8% of L.A. Population and 34% of Its Homeless. - NHS," February 13, 2021. https://nhslacounty.org/impacting-black-history-black-people-make-up-8-of-l-a-population-and-34-of-its-homeless/.
[4] Stanford University, Stanford, and California 94305, "Watts Rebellion (Los Angeles)," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, June 12, 2017. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/watts-rebellion-los-angeles.

Hills, View Park, and Leimert Park with their stately homes that would become known as the Black "Beverly Hills." Simultaneously, the Black middle class expanded into the L.A. country suburbs. By 1970, 12% of the Black population in Los Angeles County lived in the suburbs.[5] Though the Black population has always been smaller in contrast to the Black populations of other cities by 1973, the city elected its first Black Mayor, Tom Bradley. [6] His election was driven by coalition politics uniting Los Angeles' diverse population but was heavily driven by support from the Black community and in particular by the Black Churches of the city. The gentrification of Black L.A. is a combination of both racial and economic factors that would begin in the 1980s with the rise of the Latinx population in South Central. By the 2000s, the Latinx population outnumbered Black residents (58%) to (40%).[7]

The Black community in L.A. finds itself in a crisis moment. Los Angeles is rapidly gentrifying. The gentrification of Black L.A. has been heralded as a positive development with the opening of new stores, coffee shops, and event spaces in Black neighborhoods. Gentrification is not value-neutral. While touted for positively adding commercial, social, and cultural activities to neighborhoods, the idea of neighborhood "renewal" comes at a cost. Neil Smith, in his seminal text, *The New Urban Frontier,*argues that gentrification is not merely about middle-class tastes, but conquest. Smith posits that gentrification leads to the systemic remaking of cities through the erasure of existing communities by coalitions of civic and economic power based upon class.[8] If gentrification is about the systemic remaking of cities, then the issues of housing, belonging, access to resources, wealth-building, and communal/neighborhood identity, are

[5] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, 2006.
[6] Jane Fritsch, "Tom Bradley, Mayor in Era Of Los Angeles Growth, Dies," *The New York Times*, September 30, 1998, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/30/us/tom-bradley-mayor-in-era-of-los-angeles-growth-dies.html.
[7] "The History of South Central Los Angeles and Its Struggle with Gentrification," KCET, September 14, 2017, https://www.kcet.org/shows/city-rising/the-history-of-south-central-los-angeles-and-its-struggle-with-gentrification.
[8]Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (June 2002): 427–50, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00249.

exacerbated. The displacement and migration of Black persons have led to the lack of a centralized Black community. While neighborhoods such as View Park, Leimert Park, and Baldwin Hills are still predominantly Black, there is still no central hub for the Black community. As L.A. is rapidly gentrifying and Black communities are being displaced, Black cultural institutions must develop a response to gentrification. The question must be asked what is the role of the Black Church and how should Black pastors respond to gentrification?

Gentrification: A contest for control

A global revolution is occurring in the urbanization of the world's cities. The mass migration of persons from rural areas into urban centers driven by social, economic, and environmental factors has ushered in the transformation of urban cores. According to the World Bank, 4.4 billion people currently inhabit cities, with a projection of nearly 7 out of 10 people living in cities by 2050.[9] The development of urban centers has been viewed as a positive development that drives economic growth and combats inequality, climate change, and other social issues.[10] However, urbanization has also led to gentrification and the movement of middle and upper-class residents into formerly poor or working-class neighborhoods. The migration of upwardly mobile persons into poor or working-class neighborhoods exacerbates pre-existing economic, social, and racial inequality. Neil Smith argues that gentrification is about the systemic class-remaking of cities.[11] The phenomenon of gentrification is a global issue in cities such as London, Paris, Lagos, and Mexico City. In the United States, the gentrification of cities such as Los Angeles, Baltimore, Washington D.C, Atlanta, Chicago, and New York and in

[9] "Urban Development Overview," Text/HTML, World Bank, accessed November 17, 2023, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview.
[10] Vereinte Nationen, ed., *Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*, World Social Report 2020 (New York, NY: United Nations, 2020).
[11] Smith, N. (2002). New globalism, new urbanism: gentrification as global urban strategy. *Antipode*, *34*(3), 427-450.

smaller cities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma, Rochester, New York, and Silver Spring, Maryland has a particular impact on local Black communities.[12]

Roland Robertson uses the term 'glocalization' to highlight both the universal and the particular in modern social, economic, and political systems.[13] Gentrification is a global phenomenon that must also be understood as a local phenomenon that has effects on particular communities and their economic, social, spiritual, and physical life. The intersectional injustices of housing inequality, racism, and poverty that have already existed in Black urban communities are further exacerbated by the rapid shift in neighborhood demographics. Governmental, corporate, and media sources highlight gentrification as a positive force that redevelops declining communities. Mark Davidson argues that gentrification is the byproduct of neoliberal class and political alliances to draw the middle class back to the city.[14] Gentrification is not merely the movement of "urban pioneers" into undeveloped communities. Instead, gentrification is, as Neil Smith contends, a geographical strategy of economic reconquest.[15] Gentrification does not become about the upward mobility of pre-existing communities, but about creating new communities for the middle class. History has shown that the impact of public policies that support gentrification can at best lead to resegregation or, at worst, destruction, erasure, and removal of entire Black communities across the United States. Gentrification has resulted in the physical, spiritual, cultural, and social displacement of Black communities.

Cities are politically, socially, physically, and spiritually contested territory. Gentrification is a matter of political, economic, and social power. To whom does the city belong? If the city belongs to a particular class of person, then who determines access to resources, good schools,

[12] Derek S. Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).
[13] Featherstone, M., Lash, S., & Robertson, R. (1995). *Global Modernities*. SAGE.
[14] Davidson, M. (2007). Gentrification as global habitat: a process of class formation or corporate creation? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, (4), 490–506. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2007.00269.
[15] Smith, Neil. The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City. London ;: Routledge, 1996

and commercial and social resources? Who is ascribed worth? The white-collar professionals, the creative class, or the cleaner, janitor, teacher, bus driver, or undocumented workers? Gentrification opposes robust conceptions of equity, justice, and inclusion. Gentrification challenges the economic, social, and physical well-being of Black residents of urban areas. Gentrification determines access. Those with access to capital, power, and influence can craft the city based on their desires. If justice and equity are root values of our society then access to the city's resources, opportunities, and services should be available to all. As Margaret Kohn writes:

> When we purchase a house or rent an apartment we are also securing access to the city itself, to a common world made up of streets that connect us with jobs, entertainment, necessities, visual delights, encounters, barriers, threats, beneficial relationships, educational opportunities, sports facilities, and places that are more or less protected from surveillance. [16]

Cities are primarily designed for the creative class, the upwardly mobile, and those who can afford access to nice neighborhoods with high-priced amenities, schools, and goods. Gentrification reimagined centers access, flourishing, and equality for all citizens of an urban area. The poor, working class, and middle class deserve access to amenities, beautiful homes, sports facilities, coffee shops, and grocery stores. A city's public goods and services are a place of opportunity for everyone.

With the rise of globalization and urbanization, cities around the world have sought status to compete within the global market. Competing to attract tourists, capital, and investment neoliberal policies by urban governments have led to "renewal", renaissance, and reinvestment in cities. Planetary Gentrification addresses how globalizing economic factors shape the cities. Planetary gentrification recognizes that global market forces, not just local economic forces

[16] Kohn, Margaret. The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

cause changes within local cities. Cities as disparate as Shanghai, Vancouver, Seattle, Houston, Dallas, London, Toronto, Lagos, and Paris now resemble one another in many ways. Urban policies require acts of moral imagination that re-envisions the purpose of cities and the places of individuals within them. Cities should not exist merely for the affluent classes. Space, beauty, access to quality education, grocery stores, the arts, and amenities should not merely be the preserve of those with capital, access to power, or the ability to wield political mechanisms to their benefit. These things are vital for human flourishing and thriving and ought to be available for the entire populace. As Margaret Kohn argues, cities should be considered as common-wealths, places of value by past and current residents of urban areas.[17] To challenge gentrification, the mythology built around it must be addressed.

In American history, there has been a long history of anti-urbanism, with the city being viewed as a wilderness. With the rise of white flight from urban centers in the 1960s, cities were seen as chaotic, sites of moral degeneration, poverty, disease, and crime. These predominantly minority cities were viewed as needing "renewal" or "regeneration." Neil Smith argues that cities became a new "frontier" of profitability, advancing the ideology of manifest destiny not only to American urban centers but globally, as "urban pioneers" made their way back into cities supported by neoliberal government policies. Kelly Brown Douglas, in *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* writes, "the narrative of Manifest Destiny inevitably flows from America's exceptionalist identity…It is only right, in other words, to make the world "better" by investing it in a superior way of living, especially if that is considered a reflection of the eternal law."[18] Gentrification became a form of manifest destiny or a revanchist city as argued by Neil Smith. The middle class needed to takeover to "redeem" the city from

[17] Ibid.
[18] Kelly, D. B. (2015). *Stand Your Ground*. Orbis Books.

countervailing forces. The alliance between developers and city governments to remake cities began in the 1960s with programs of urban renewal. When protests against urban renewal arose by a newly elected Black political class in the 1960s, new forms of gentrification arose in the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and 2000s through *embryonic* and *contemporary* gentrification. *Embryonic* and *contemporary* gentrification as particular forms of urban redevelopment will be further explored in the next section. Gentrification is built upon mythology; in this case,the city as a new urban frontier is tied to the mythology of manifest destiny of the West. Despite the land already being occupied by indigenous peoples, the myth of the wild and unconquered west drove the movement of persons to take already occupied lands in the name of "civilizing" these territories. Likewise, the city as an "urban frontier" is built upon ahistorical mythology that ignores pre-existing communities, history, and cultures for the sake of "civilizing" the "inner city." This myth-making is supported by the media and social, cultural, and political institutions. Gentrification "cleans up" neighborhoods, raises real-estate prices, and neighborhoods become re-invented with new names- such as the reimagining of neighborhoods in Washington D.C. Adams Morgan becoming AdMo, or Trinidad becomingUnion Market.

## Mythology and Gentrification

Gentrification thrives off mythology. Developers, politicians, media, and banks ignore the histories of communities. Cities become tabula rasa- blank slates waiting to be redeveloped by the creative and upper classes. Margaret Kohn writes, "The character of the neighborhood is destroyed and replaced with something different."[19] Gentrification, she argues, becomes about the production of space for more affluent uses.[20] That space is occupied by Black communities

[19] Kohn, Margaret. The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.
[20]Ibid.

that have been redlined, under-invested in, and maligned as a "wild west," characterized as "inner-cities and ghettos." The intentional a-historicity and mythology building of gentrification perpetuates violence towards existing communities. Ignoring existing cultures, institutions, mom-and-pop stores, local religious institutions, and third spaces, the forces behind gentrification mythologize the city and malign existing communities to justify their redevelopment. Tone Huse argues, "In light of this, gentrification can be seen as trying to fix something that is actually not broken, but that must be understood as such in order for the 'gentrification fix' to be deemed legitimate."[21] This, in addition to the harms already listed,represents the harm of gentrification, in that it does not invest in these communities for their benefit or sake, nor does it seek to work in collaboration with existing communities to develop holistic ecosystems in which everyone can thrive. As Neil Smith writes:

> The frontier imagery is neither merely decorative nor innocent, therefore, but carries considerable ideological weight. Insofar as gentrification infects working-class communities, displaces poor households, and converts whole neighborhoods into bourgeois enclaves, the frontier ideology rationalizes social differentiation and exclusion as natural, inevitable. The poor and working class are all too easily defined as "uncivil," on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages and communists. The substance and consequence of the frontier imagery is to tame the wild city, to socialize a wholly new and therefore challenging set of processes into safe ideological focus. As such, the frontier ideology justifies monstrous incivility in the heart of the city.[22]

The mythology of gentrification provides the fuel for the reconquest of the city. While gentrification is a global issue, the "Wild West" is a distinctive form of American thought and practice. It is a modern version of manifest destiny: the city becomes a contested territory, ushing out, destroying, and erasing communities for the sake of "progress." Gentrification then becomes

[21] Lees, Loretta, and Martin Phillips. *Handbook of Gentrification Studies.* 1st ed. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018.
[22] Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*

a war of narratives. Whose story is told and who gets to control the future of communities is determined by those with power. Gentrification  could also be imagined as a form of class warfare that echoes the conquests of Western pioneers who sought to establish beachheads of civilization in previously untamed territories. Gentrification focuses on creating a city modeled on middle-class aesthetics and sensibilities.

> Gentrification portends a class conquest of the city. The new urban pioneers seek to scrub the city clean of its working-class geography and history. By remaking the geography of the city they simultaneously rewrite its social history as a preemptive justification for a new urban future. Slum tenements become historic brownstones, and exterior facades are sandblasted to reveal a future past. Likewise with interior renovation. "Inner worldly asceticism becomes public display" as "bare brick walls and exposed timbers come to signify cultural discernment, not the poverty of slums without plaster" (Jager 1986:79– 80, 83, 85). Physical effacement of original structures effaces social history and geography; if the past is not entirely demolished it is at least reinvented— its class and race contours rubbed smooth— in the refurbishment of a palatable past.[23]

Gentrification can also be viewed as a form of white supremacy. The white flight of the 1950s-1970s led to the underdevelopment of urban areas, redlining, and the mythological development of the "inner city." The "inner city"  rendered as a place of danger, blight, and concentrated poverty. The 1980s war on drugs and the depiction of the welfare queen further exacerbated the idea of the city as a reckless, racially-coded Wild Wild West. Tone Huse argues that gentrification leads to the association of whiteness with cleanliness and order. [24] As a white supremacist tool, gentrification derives the city in the form of whiteness. Huse argues that

[23] Ibid
[24] Lees, Loretta, and Martin Phillips. *Handbook of Gentrification Studies.* 1st ed. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018.

community members do not become vital citizens who get input on the shape and contour of their neighborhoods and cities but become a problem to be dealt with.[25]

Forms of Gentrification

Gentrification has also taken multiple forms in its development. Embryonic and New Build Gentrification have been two forces that work in co-existence to reimagine urban space. Historically, embryonic gentrification has involved the migration of middle-class and upper-class residents into formerly poor or working-class neighborhoods.[26] This type of gentrification occurred as early as the turn of the twentieth century and experienced its height in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s through urban renewal programs federal, state, and local policies backed these programs that encouraged the redevelopment of urban neighborhoods. Often referred to as "brownstoning," "back to the city" or urban regeneration, embryonic gentrification occurred in places such as Greenwich Village in Manhattan and Park Slope in Brooklyn, as well as Inman Park and Virginia Highland in Atlanta. Embryonic gentrification focuses on rehabilitating or redeveloping pre-existing homes and structures. The development of property and the opportunity for home ownership drove embryonic gentrification by individuals. One of the supposed benefits of embryonic gentrification was racial and economic diversity. However, embryonic gentrification often led to the gradual displacement of entire communities of persons who could no longer afford the rent or taxes in particular communities. Neil Smith further argues that, like a real frontier, the actions of “pioneers" were not supported by intrepid adventurers, but by capital. Banks, real estate developers, and retail corporations followed the movement of professional classes into urban centers.

[25] Ibid.
[26] Gale, D. E. (2021). *The Misunderstood History of Gentrification* (p. 170).

> The economic geography of gentrification is not random; developers do not just plunge into the heart of slum opportunity, but tend to take it piece by piece. Rugged pioneers' manship is tempered by financial caution. Developers have a vivid block-by block sense of where the frontier lies. They move in from the outskirts, building "a few strategically placed outposts of luxury," as Henwood (1988:10) has put it. They "pioneer" first on the gold coast between safe neighborhoods on one side where property values are high and the disinvested slums on the other where opportunity is higher. Successive beachheads and defensible borders are established on the frontier. In this way economic geography charts the strategy of urban pioneering.[27]

A new form of gentrification entitled "New Build," contemporary, or advanced gentrification, emerged between the 1980s and the 2000s. "New Build" gentrification became a global phenomenon in cities ranging from London, Sydney, and Vancouver, to Los Angeles, and New York. Mark Davidson argues that gentrification in relation to globalization is found through corporate developers or gentrifiers, who through the construction of new built environments or lifestyle choices are remaking urban centers. Contemporary, advanced, or new-build gentrification involves the development of socio-spatial landscapes,typically through the destruction or removal of pre-existing communities by tearing down "run-down homes", removing poor and minority residents, and rebuilding space. Corporate interests and corporate real estate drive contemporary gentrification. The corporate development of large, luxurious apartment complexes with an architectural aesthetic favored by the professional middle class is the hallmark of new-build gentrification. Urban dog parks, trails, breweries, coffee shops, and the development of former commercial properties into residential properties are also signs of advanced gentrification. New build gentrification has led to what Nicholas Bromley calls "new dynamics of inequality" in which the urban professional class is valorized, while the poor are

[27] Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

viewed as inhibiting the progress of cities.[28] Neighborhoods are renamed to draw new professional classes and support the erasure of existing communities. Legal interventions targeting the poor and homeless in public spaces, increased police surveillance, and the development of public spaces by private entities have been tools used by city governments to support urban redevelopment. Neil Smith contends that advanced gentrification begins with intentional disinvestment by institutions in particular communities.[29] Intentional disinvestment leads to deteriorating housing conditions, increased health hazards, homelessness, and crime, which then creates the environment for the displacement of the marginalized, specifically the poor and minorities, from communities. Advanced gentrification then demolished existing communities in the name of removing blight, so that new development could be built from scratch. Contemporary gentrification supported by capital thus remakes urban cities, removing persons and entire communities so that the the social, political, and economic elite can better compete in a globalized economy.

Gentrification and Los Angeles

Gentrification is a global phenomenon, but also a local phenomenon that is expresseddifferently in various cities. Although it was not originally cited in gentrification literature in the 80s and 90s, the National Community Reinvestment Coalition found Los Angeles to be one of the most intensely gentrified cities in the United States. [30] Neighborhoods such as Leimert Park, Crenshaw, Inglewood, Baldwin Hills, View Park, West Adams, Windsor

[28] Blomley, N. K. (2004). *Unsettling the City*. Psychology Press.
[29] Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,
[30] Jason Richardson, Bruce Mitchell, and Jad Edlebi, "Gentrification and Disinvestment 2020," June 17, 2020, https://ncrc.org/gentrification20/.

Hills and much of South Central Los Angeles are being rapidly gentrified. South L.A.,once denigrated by popular culture in movies such as *Friday* or *Boyz in the Hood,* is being massively transformed by the investment of developers, governmental policies, and civic institutions. Inglewood, a once predominantly black city near the Los Angeles Airport, has transformed swiftly with the development of SoFi Stadium, completed in 2020 at the cost of $5 billion, and the building of a new stadium by the L.A. Clippers. These developments prompted new construction, rising housing costs, and an influx of diverse residents. Professionals driven by convenient access to the airport, beaches, affordable homes, and new amenities have moved to Inglewood rather than choose formerly popular neighborhoods such as Hollywood, Santa Monica, or Pacific Palisades. In West Adams a once historic Black and Latinx neighborhood young Black professionals many transplants to L.A. gather at *The Gathering Spot* a social club and co-working space surrounded by both Hispanic grocery stores and hip condos/lofts, restaurants, and coffee shops.

Contemporary gentrification has reimagined the socio-spatial landscape of L.A. often transforming the architectural distinctiveness of particular neighborhoods into a middle-class aesthetic befitting urban middle-class professionals that could be found anywhere around the globe. Juliet Kahne argues that L.A. demonstrates planetary gentrification.[31] Planetary gentrification, as defined by the *Handbook of Gentrification Studies,* argues that gentrification is not limited to local circumstances and conditions but unfolds at a planetary or global scale. The development of bike lanes, dog parks, and the redesign of city libraries and parks have also constituted signifiers of gentrification in L.A. These developments share the hallmarks of an emerging form of class-based segregation in which only the middle and upper classes can afford

[31] Lees, Loretta, and Martin Phillips. *Handbook of Gentrification Studies.* 1st ed. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018.

to live in the city. Amenities and commercial activities are designed for the aesthetic taste of the city's professional and middle classes. The gentrification of Black Los Angeles comes at a cost. As Neil Smith writes,

> Evicted from the public as well as the private spaces of what is fast becoming a downtown bourgeois playground, minorities, the unemployed and the poorest of the working class are destined for large-scale displacement. Once isolated in central city enclaves, they are increasingly herded to reservations on the urban edge.[32]

The cost of living is no longer affordable for the city's poor and working class, who are relegated to neighborhoods in particular portions of South L.A. such as Watts, or are being driven outside of L.A. to the Inland Empire or even outside of California to cities such as Houston, Atlanta, or other southern cities. Gentrification in L.A. also shares the hallmarks of being supported by neoliberal policies and collaboration between the government and developers.

## Gentrification and Black Los Angeles

Gentrification of Black Los Angeles must be understood not merely as a local phenomenon but as part of glocalizing forces. Gentrification is a global phenomenon involving the intentional redesign of cities for a middle-class demographic. The spatial aesthetic, commercial development, and amenities are designed to attract the professional classes. The intentional disinvestment of resources from working-class and minority communities inhibits the well-being and flourishing of all persons, not just the economically advantaged.

Gentrification as a local phenomenon has effects on particular communities and their economic, social, spiritual, and physical life. Within American urban communities in places such as Harlem, Dallas, Houston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington D.C.,

[32] Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996.

gentrification has led to the displacement of Black persons from neighborhoods and communities they once resided. Historical landmarks, churches, community organizations, and other sites of community life have been torn down, removed, or forced to relocate. Intersectionality must also be applied to understanding gentrification in cities like Los Angeles, D.C., and Atlanta. While historically Black residents are being displaced in some areas they are being displaced by new middle and upper-class Black residents or creatives. Gentrification is not only about race but is an economic force that must consider the impact it makes on existing residents. Gentrification, particularly contemporary or new build gentrification, becomes a class-based phenomenon that seeks to reimagine the city as a haven for the middle class. Researchers such as Sabiyha Prince argue that gentrification in cities such as Washington D.C. still impacts Black middle and upper middle-class persons.[33]

An intersectional lens helps us to understand how Black communities can be participants in gentrification. However, it does not stop how gentrification as a form of public policy, banking practices, developer investment, and political back-dealing segregates communities along class lines and leads to the destruction, erasure, and removal of entire Black communities across the United States. Gentrification in the United States cannot be removed from a history of white supremacy.

Gentrification and its impact on Black Los Angeles cannot be understood without examining the impact of redlining and racial covenants. Unlike cities such as Philadelphia, New York, or Chicago, the Black population of Los Angeles, despite legalized segregation, had fluidity in terms of movement. As the Black population grew in Los Angeles during the early 20th century – swelling to 15,000 by 1920 – Central Avenue came to serve as the hub of Black

[33] Hyra, Derek S., and Sabiyha Prince, eds. Capital Dilemma : Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC. New York ;: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Los Angeles, as recently arrived Black migrants settled along its corridor. Distinct Black communities emerged as Black middle and upper-middle-class persons in the 1930s and 1940s moved towards the westside into neighborhoods such as West Jefferson, West Adams, and Sugar Hill. The eastside, Central Avenue, and Watts became distinctly Black working class and poor communities while remaining the cultural hub of the Black community. As racial covenants were struck down legally, the Black middle and upper classes continued to move further west. View Park, Windsor Hills, Baldwin Hills, and Ladera Heights became enclaves of the Black Middle and Upper Middle Classes in the 1970s and 1980s. As housing costs rose in Beverly Hills, Hancock Park, Pacific Palisades, and Santa Monica, communities such as Leimert Park, Watts, and Inglewood gradually gentrified due to collaboration between local governments and developers.[34]

These neighborhoods, particularly Inglewood, have been characterized as the next frontier, prime for development. The proximity to LAX airport, the building of new housing, renovation of pre-existing housing, have led to Inglewood being "re-discovered." The gentrification of Black Los Angeles ignores the thriving communities that existed there for decades. The rising costs of housing therefore lead to the physical, spiritual, cultural, and social displacement of Black communities. Gentrification focuses on the aesthetics, pleasure, and well-being of the middle class, without concern for the poor and marginalized. Gentrification is oppressive, as it not only displaces people from their homes or makes communities no longer affordable, but also causes spiritual and psychological harm. Gentrification as enacted through neoliberal policies denies the dignity, worth, and value of personhood of Black persons, causing spiritual, physical, mental, and social harm, illness, and death. Local communities must advocate

[34] Smith, Erika D. 2021. "Black Homeowners in South L.A. Wrestle with Gentrification - Los Angeles Times." Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times. October 22, 2021. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-22/black-homeowners-south-la-wrestle-with-gentrification.

for policies and partnerships that allow their neighborhoods to be revitalized without the displacement of current residents.

Whose Neighborhood and Whose Church: Gentrification and the Black Church

Urban reimagination should come from the communities most affected by it. Chapter Three will further explore a theological framework for addressing gentrification. However, in this section, an understanding of urban theology provides a theological reflection on the crisis of gentrification. British theologian Andrew Davey writes, "Urban theology, or urban theological practice, comes from communities and individuals familiar with much of this from daily experience."[35] Black churches are uniquely situated to address the challenges of gentrification. Urban theological practice derives from the community. Black churches as institutions are grounded in the life of their communities. Black churches are familiar with the shifts in their neighborhoods, they know what commercial enterprises were in the neighborhood, who has lived where, and have witnessed for generations the dynamics occurring in particular communities. Davey further argues, "Urban theology will straddle the global and local arising from the reflection and experience of people in real, concrete situations and analysis of all the forces that are shaping the community."[36] Historically, Black churches were the cultural centers of their communities, providingspiritual, social, and cultural uplift through programming ranging from after-school care, housing developments, Alcoholics Anonymous, social services, and health services. As Eric Lincoln and LawrenceMamiya claim, "The Black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of Black America."[37] However, the Black Church needs a new theological lens

[35] Davey, Andrew. *Urban Christianity and Global Order : Theological Resources for an Urban Future*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.
[36] Ibid.
[37]Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

to adequately respond to gentrification. Black churches will need to use a *glocal* analysis to understand the social, economic, cultural, and political forces that have led to the gentrification of their communities. A systemic analysis will keep Black churches from despairing and focusing only on the challenges of their particular congregation. Instead, it will form a coherent theological vision for Black communities that addresses the questions of who is allowed access to resources, who gets to flourish, and who gets to benefit from the positive changes that take place in communities such as stores, grocery stores, and other amenities. Andrew Davey writes, "The scope of urban theology encompasses the concerns of an urbanizing world and the condition of the Christian presence and witness in it, rooted in the struggles of the poor to shape and own their communities – whether it is the physical environment in which they live, the civil arrangements, or the *ekklesia* (the church) that they form around the scriptures and the Eucharist."[38] Davey roots his urban theology in the class struggles of the poor and the struggle for self-autonomy.

However, the urban Black church is not merely a poor or working-class phenomenon. Many urban Black churches are commuter congregations composed of Black middle-class and upper-middle-class persons who drive in from other parts of the city or the suburbs. While these urban Black churches are often commuter congregations they still serve as a "home" for their parishioners. Michelle Chatman writes, "In the case of Black urban churches, though many parishioners may no longer live in the urban neighborhoods where churches are located, the church serves as a kind of homeplace for its members, offering a touchpoint to the past, nurturing relationships and social networks established in previous generations."[39] However, some Black

[38] Davey, Andrew. *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.
[39] Chatman, Michelle Coghill. *"Talking About Tally's Corner: Church Elders Reflect on Race, Place, and Removal in Washington, DC."* Transforming anthropology 25, no. 1 (2017): 35–49.

scholars argue that the presence of Black congregations in urban areas does not always mean that they advocate for those on the margins. Urban Black churches are enclaves of the middle class whose policies, statements, and advocacy focus on the concerns of their middle-class adherents. Keri Day writes:

> In fact, black churches are often deeply ambivalent, joining in solidarity with poor black women. Many middle-class black communities do not see themselves as responsible for helping those locked within poor black communities. In fact, the poor are often excluded from liberal and conservative denominational churches…Some of the larger Black churches in inner cities are constituted of commuting middle class members who do not feel any sense of responsibility for their inner city neighbors.[40]

Day's argument must be taken seriously: what is the responsibility of Black middle-class persons to communities in which they no longer dwell? Black Churches can also be vehicles of gentrification if they no longer serve the communities in which they are located. However, Anthony Pinn highlights Black Megachurches such as West Angeles COGIC as exemplars in community development and advocacy.[41] Black Churches are not entirely middle class and many Black megachurches in Los Angeles, such as West Angeles Church of God in Christ, Faithful Central, First AME, and the Crenshaw Christian Center "Faithdome," while notably composed of Black middle-class members, also draw socio-economically diverse congregations. Other historically black congregations that are smaller to medium-sized such as Park Hills Community Church, Second Baptist Church, Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship, Trinity Missionary Baptist Church, or the multiple Black New Thought and Religious Science congregations are also primarily middle-class congregations but also serve a diverse constituency composed of residents and suburban commuters.

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[40] Day, Keri. *Unfinished Business : Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America.* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2012.
[41] Pinn, Anthony B. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era.* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002.

Gentrification brings new challenges to Black Churches. Describing gentrification and its impact on a Black Pentecostal church in D.C., Michelle Chatman writes:

> Like other congregations in DC, Mt. Zion members are trying to figure out their future, attempting to strategize for their survival if they are to stay in the city…. Their recognition of the difference in religious expression among Blacks, whites, and Latinos offers little consolation. Whites and Latinos who have visited the church do not become regularly tithing members, and even if they did, one would wonder if suppressed tensions, particularly between Blacks and whites, would compromise the vitality of the church.[42]

Black churches are confronted not only with their responsibility to the flourishing of their communities, but also with addressing how to serve their communities if they no longer reflect demographics that are familiar to them. Black churches have orientations towards community development and social outreach, whether, a congregation comprises community members or commuters, or occupies a megachurch or a storefront. Black churches still carry a mandate to serve the neighborhoods in which they find themselves. Sandra Lyn Barnes, in a study of Black Megachurches found that most posited a *social gospel* theology espousing  a responsibility towards the local community. She writes:

> Despite theological syncretism, social justice, servanthood, and self-help themes also undergird a Social Gospel message and subsequent church programs. Clergy perspectives also include prophetic elements that tap into existing themes and images from Black history and the historic Black Church to promote church missions and create a Black megachurch vision that resonates with believers. Social Gospel proponents here believe that the size, scope, and nature of their church programs as well as their political activism are more than forms of evangelism, but constitute social reform and political action in the tradition of the Social Gospel movement.[43]

Through their community development corporations, West Angeles COGIC, First AME, and the Faithdome, as well as other Black megachurches, have been involved in economic, political, and

[42] Chatman, Michelle Coghill. *"Talking About Tally's Corner: Church Elders Reflect on Race, Place, and Removal in Washington, DC."* Transforming anthropology 25, no. 1 (2017): 35–49.
[43] Barnes, Sandra Lynn. "Black Megachurches: Social Gospel Usage and Community Empowerment." *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2012): 177–98. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43525419.

social issues affecting Black Los Angeles. These congregations are also impacted by gentrification with many of their congregations displaced from local neighborhoods and commuting from the suburbs.

Urban theological praxis will lead these congregations to ask: by what processes and market forces are we being driven by or affected by? What is our responsibility to the flourishing and well-being of all persons, and how can our congregations help lead to the revitalization of our neighborhoods? A study on gentrification in Seattle argues that Black churches play a unique role in addressing gentrification, "the cost is the loss of important historical communities, institutions, and residents in serving the interests of wealthier (and generally whiter) communities. Because local historic churches often control their land, as well as adjacent or nearby parcels, they are uniquely positioned to respond to this problem by orienting themselves to a community-based development model."[44] Black churches in urban areas, particularly in Los Angeles, are suited to addressing the challenges of gentrification. A *glocal* analysis, combined with an urban theological praxis, enables Black churches to not only examine the problems facing their communities, but also to partner with governmental, non-profit, educational, and social organizations to maintain and develop strong Black communities.

[44] Born, Branden, Rachel Berney, Olivia Baker, Mark R. Jones, Donald King, and Dylan Marcus. "*Pushing Back on Displacement: Community-Based Redevelopment through Historically Black Churches."* Societies (Basel, Switzerland) 11, no. 1 (2021): 10.

# CHAPTER TWO

# SANKOFA: PAST WISDOM FOR A PRESENT CRISIS

This chapter explores the Black pastor as a prophetic agent. Grounded in historical analysis, this chapter examines models of the Black pastorate and how Black pastors have previously engaged in issues of social justice. Central to the success of the Black pastor in addressing social issues is a sense of prophetic agency. This chapter will first begin with defining prophetic agency and its role in the Black Church. It will then examine the crisis points facing the Black community and why prophetic agents are needed. It will then explore the ministries of historic prophetic agents Reverdy Ransom, Henry Hugh Proctor, and J. Raymond Henderson. It will then close by looking toward contemporary prophetic agents in Black Churches.

## Prophetic Agency

New York Theological Seminary defines the prophetic agent as follows: "as a prophet, a minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society."

A prophet does not "foretell" so much as "forth-tell" the truth as defined by New York Theological Seminary. The prophetic tradition is one of calling forth God's dreams for the world. In the Christian tradition, it is speaking that which is not as though it were (Romans 4:17). Utilizing the pulpit, media, and the written word, the prophetic agent speaks truth to power within their local congregations and communities. Prophetic agency requires the ability to be like the "sons of Issachar" in 1 Chronicles 12:32 who were able to understand the times.

Walter Brueggman in his seminal book ,*Prophetic Imagination,* writes that to be a prophetic agent does not require grand acts: "rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice."[45] Black prophetic ministry is grounded in a prophetic imagination, but is also distinct in that it is concerned with the wholeness of Black persons. Black prophetic ministry believes that God is the God of the oppressed and that God moves and works on behalf of those who are on the margins of the world. Christopher Z. Hobson, in *The Mount Of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition from 1800-1950,* writes:

> The constant elements in African American prophetic thought are the assumptions that God is the protector of the race; that he has acted mightily in history to aid the oppressed, and will again; that the United States will be tested and judged by its turn toward or from God's justice; and—for the majority tradition in prophecy thinking, including those quoted here—that the race's trials begun on the shores of Africa are destined to end at an unspecified but finite time in a redeemed, transfigured United States.[46]

For Black pastors, prophetic agency is the ability to understand the political, cultural, social, and spiritual movements occurring around them, and having the ability to listen and respond with "thus saith the lord." Prophetic agency is imperative in the Black religious tradition. The Black pulpit can't be separated from the lived realities and concerns facing Black communities. As J. Deotis Roberts writes in *Roots Of A Black Future: Family and Church,* "Black religion is concerned about the liberation of the whole person – Body, Mind, and Soul."[47] Black prophetic

[45] Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination 40th Anniversary Edition.* 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2018.
[46] Hobson, Christopher Z. *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950*. New York; Oxford University Press, 2012.
[47] Roberts, J. Deotis (James Deotis). *Roots of a Black Future : Family and Church*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

pastors are concerned about not only the salvation of the soul, but also liberation from forces that would hold persons down economically, socially, and politically.

Prophetic agents are guided by a spiritual, moral, and ethical call to challenge unjust systems and powers that destroy Black persons, Black families, and Black communities. Black pastors as prophetic agents offer up an alternative vision or a realm of possibilities for the renewal of urban areas. As prophetic agents, Black Pastors have an understanding of God and scripture that sees the city as the realm of God and a place of flourishing for all persons. As J. Deotis Roberts writes, "Black religion provides meaning in an otherwise meaningless situation."[48] Prophetic agents are,most importantly, agents of hope. They create meaning, hope, and possibility in hopeless situations. They peer into the abyss of social crises and find the glimmers of God's activity even in the darkness. Like the Old Testament prophets, they cast a vision of restoration amid exile, hope in despair, and possibilities when it seems all hope is lost. Brueggman continues:

> Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate despair so that new futures can be believed in and embraced by us. There is a yearning for energy in a world grown weary: "The age has lost its youth, and the times begin to grow old" (2 Esd 14:10). And we do know that the only act that energizes is a word, a gesture, an act that believes in our future and affirms it to us disinterestedly.[49]

The prophetic agent is one who not only proclaims new futures but believes that God can create new futures. Like the prophet Amos they declare the hopes and dreams of God for God's people. As Amos 9:14 states, "I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them"

[48] Ibid.
[49] Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination 40th Anniversary Edition.* 40th anniversary edition. Minneapolis Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2018.

Prophetic agency has a deep lineage in the spirituality of the Black Churches. The Black prophetic tradition is not merely the adaptation of a role or a singular person. In the modern Black church – particularly the Pentecostal/neo-pentecostal branches – the prophet is a singular person who foretells the future for others. Prophetic agents in the liberative Black church tradition are grounded in scripture and the experience of Black persons. Christopher Z. Hobson writes:

> African American prophecy was usually not a special office exercised by an individual over a span of years or a lifetime, but a kind of speech or writing that occurred to its practitioners as they turned to questions that arose in community life. These questions involved the nature and destiny of African Americans and the larger society they inhabited, and God's purposes for both. Prophetic speakers shared theological emphases that were common in African American worship, such as a belief in God's providence for freedom, and they developed these into prophetic views of God's purposes and the communal and national future by tapping, adapting, and varying biblical teachings to suit present circumstances.[50]

Black prophecy and prophetic agents believe that there is a destiny for Black persons, families, and communities. As this project demonstrates, the issues of urban renewal, gentrification, and black displacement are not new. Utilizing a sankofa paradigm, this chapter will examine how Black pastors have operated as prophetic agents historically to create a model for the future.

## Sankofa Moments

Black persons are experiencing physical, spiritual, cultural, and social displacement due to gentrification. The Black community in Los Angeles is in a precarious position as gentrification, lack of affordable housing, and lack of middle-class and working-class job opportunities have driven Blacks from the city. In a 2020 study, white households had a median

[50] Hobson, Christopher Z. *The Mount of Vision : African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950*. New York ; Oxford University Press, 2012.

net worth of $355,000, compared to $4,000 for Black households.[51] Historic Black neighborhoods such as Leimert Park, Crenshaw, and Baldwin Hills have seen a 42% drop in population since 2018.[52] Simultaneously, as the Black community declines many historic Black congregations have seen a decline in membership or the retirement of their pastoral leadership including West Angeles COGIC, Faithful Central Bible Church, and First A.M.E. Church. As the ground is shifting in the Black community of Los Angeles, the question arises: what is the role of the Black pastor in speaking to this moment? How can Black pastors serve as prophetic agents who can speak a vision for God's good future for Black persons and communities?

The Sankofa bird of the Akan people encourages people to look backward to move forward. A Sankofa moment is needed in which Black Pastors look back to find a way to move forward to address the multiplicity of crises facing the Black community. In particular, gentrification is a hegemonic force that destroys Black communities under the guise of urban renewal and revitalization. Gentrification in many of its forms disinvests in Black communities in order to reshape these neighborhoods and communities. Gentrification is guided by a mythological vision as explored in chapter one that is proffered by political, economic, and cultural power brokers. How can Black persons and communities thrive if separated from the cultural institutions that provide meaning-making, community, and holistic well-being as cities are shaped by gentrification and lose Black residents? New pastoral leadership grounded in the prophetic witness of the Black Churches is needed in light of the systemic challenges facing the Black community. The recovery of historic models of church life and pastoral leadership, when contextualized for 21st-century circumstances, may provide a way forward.

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[51] Hepler, Lauren. 2020. *"California's Black Exodus Comes with a Hidden Toll for Transplants."* CalMatters. Cal Matters. July 15, 2020. https://calmatters.org/projects/california-black-population-exodus/.
[52] Ibid.

Crisis Points

At the turn of the twentieth century in Chicago, The Rev. Reverdy Ransom, an entrepreneurial African Methodist Episcopal minister observed the plight of the burgeoning Black community. As migrants arrived daily fleeing racial terror in the southern United States, Ransom questioned the role and purpose of the Church. Was the church's primary role the "salvation" of souls and the preaching of the gospel? Or was there a practical gospel; a social gospel? An embodied faith that spoke to the social, political, material, and religious needs of the Black community. Simultaneously, in Atlanta, the Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor of the First Congregational Church of Atlanta, questioned the relevance of the Black Churches to the pressing needs of the Black community after the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre.

Some forty years later in Los Angeles, the Rev. J. Raymond Henderson of the Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles would ask similar questions. How does the Black Church respond to the second-class status of Black folks in American society? His colleague Clayton D. Russell at the People's Independent Church of Christ would also address the challenges facing Black Los Angeles. Is the Church's role relegated to the other-worldly or does it maintain a responsibility to the salvation of the body and the soul? In the wake of the 1992 riots following the beating of Rodney King, the Rev. Dr. Cecil Chip Murray, an African Methodist Episcopal Minister cut from the same cloth as Reverdy Ransom, would take up the mantle of prophetic agency in Los Angeles. His sermons and leadership interrogated the responsibility of the Black Church towards economic development and the renewal of Black Los Angeles.

These ministers in the early 20th century and late 20th century faced issues of racial violence, economic injustice, urban renewal, housing crisis, and lack of access to healthcare. Over one hundred years later in the 21st century, the Black community faces the same

challenges. The future of the Black community is precarious due to the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic terrorism against Black communities, health inequities, and the focus of this project gentrification that has led to the displacement of Black communities.

Reverdy Ransom

At the turn of the twentieth century, Black folks lived in an age of terror: "between 1901 and 1929, more than 1,200 blacks were lynched in the South. Forty-one percent of these lynchings occurred in two exceptionally violent states: Georgia (250) and Mississippi (245)."[53] Jim Crow, economic injustice, violence, poor healthcare, lack of jobs and of affordable housing faced Black communities. Thousands of African Americans fled to the Urban North, Midwest, and West seeking respite from the terror of Southern violence. Subsequently, in their new homes, they faced conditions similar to if not worse than those they previously experienced. Despair or resignation would have been acceptable and understandable in the face this protracted crisis. Urban Black preachers were ill-equipped for the multiplicity of crises they faced. Reverdy Ransom wrote, "The number of these people increased so rapidly that the colored clergymen of the city were bewildered. They were unprepared by training, experience, and vision, to cope with the moral, social, and economic conditions so suddenly thrust upon them"[54]

Yet, Black preachers refused to succumb to hopelessness or theological nihilism. Instead, they developed a theology of hope and resistance and a praxis of liberation. This theology of hope refused to allow the circumstances and conditions of African Americans to circumscribe the possibilities for first-rate citizenship and opportunities for their community. South African Theologian Alan Boesak in describing hope writes:

[53]Representatives, Office of US House. 2019. *Black Americans in Congress 1870-2019*. Independently Published.
[54] Ransom, Reverdy Cassius. 1949. *The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son*. Nashville: Sunday School Union.

> Hope is the womb in which all these struggles are conceived and nurtured, and out of which they are all born into the world for the healing of the world. For Christians, it is interrupted but resilient hope. Sanctified by the interruption of history by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this hope reveals the violence and injustices at work in the systems of our world and calls for our solidarity with those robbed of hope by the brutal powers of this world, even as it reveals in the righteousness of the strength of those who struggle and live in hope. [55]

Hope cannot only be maintained as an ideal; it must be enfleshed. Black prophetic agents such as Reverdy Ransom sought to enflesh hope and turn the experiences of Black Americans into a movement for liberation and justice. Ransom, (working/preaching) in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Chicago, and Harlem, confronted those who would relegate the church to spiritual matters without concern for the lived realities of his parishioners.

Born in Flushing, Ohio in 1861, Ransom was educated at Wilberforce University and ordained as an Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Exposed to the works of white social gospel preachers such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rausenbusch, Ransom combined the theological and economic theories of the *social gospel* with the liberationist teachings of the A.M.E. Church. Cornelius Bynum quotes Reverdy Ransom as stating, "the yoke of oppression that plagued African Americans could not be shed by "inertly waiting for fortuitous circumstances to transpire."[56]

Facing the dark alleyways of his poor laboring congregation in Alleghany County, Reverdy Ransom awakened to the desperate needs of his people. After a number of years in Pennsylvania he was assigned to the city of Chicago. Ransom found himself as moved by the struggles of Black migrants fleeing the terror of racial violence in the South as he was by the

[55] Boesak, Allan Aubrey. 2014. *Dare We Speak of Hope?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
[56] Bynum, Cornelius L. 2008. *"An Equal Chance in the Race for Life': Reverdy C. Ransom, Socialism, and the Social Gospel Movement, 1890-1920." The Journal of African American History*, no. 1 (January): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1086/jaahv93n1p1.

conditions of his previous parishes. He began to articulate/develop/express  a theology of hope and a praxis of liberation, believing it was the divine responsibility of African Americans to work untiringly toward justice. Ransom was a proponent of the social gospel believing that the Kingdom of God was not just otherworldly but one which was realizable in the present. As a prophetic agent Ransom believed that the church had to proclaim a righteousness that spoke truth to power. Christopher Z. Hobson quotes Ransom in *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950* stating:

> We want prophets who will prophesy to this present age, calling upon the poor and oppressed to arise and boldly claim complete political justice and economic freedom, prophets who will lift up their voice against corrupt courts and unjust laws, prophets who cannot be bribed and who know no fear; men who will make no compromise with those half truths by which designing men seek to chloroform the social and civic conscience of the nation.[57]

As a prophetic agent Ransom emphasized humanity's responsibility to be the hands and feet of God within the world. Ransom's prophetic agency was robust, courageous, and willing to summon persons toward righteous action. Hebelieved that the cause of justice for Black folks was a holy cause, one in which they played a role in the coming of God's kingdom. In a 1920 sermon to the General Conference of the A.M.E. Church, he preached:

> Those who wait upon God work ceaselessly for the fulfillment of the vision toward which they strive. So these Americans of African descent, while waiting, have been serving their apprenticeship in preparation for the great role they are to play in the consummation of God’s plans, by establishing the church, the home, and the

[57] Hobson, Christopher Z. *The Mount of Vision : African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950.* New York ;: Oxford University Press, 2012.

> school, by acquiring knowledge in all the arts and sciences of the modern world.[58]

Prophetic agents particularly in the Black tradition are willing not only to speak out against the external forces that hold Black folks captive, but also against internal forces that would withhold persons from liberation. Ransom was a critic not only of white supremacy, but also of any Black organization that stood against the liberation of Black persons in practice. For example, he was not satisfied with the staid and traditional A.M.E. churches he found in the Chicago upon his arrival. Struck by the needs of the teeming masses of southern migrants, Ransom sought to develop a class consciousness in which the insights of social science, socialism, and the social gospel would meld to create a new type of church where the needs of African Americans could be met. In 1900, Ransom founded the Institutional Church and Settlement House. The church established a men's Bible class, kindergarten, day nursery, reading room and library, gymnasium, boys and girls clubs, clubs for men and women, and classes ranging from music to homemaking. The mission of the church sought to address the material, social, and spiritual needs of Black Chicago Ransom wrote:

> The Institutional A.M.E. The Church of Chicago was not born before its time. It comes to meet and serve the social conditionals and industrial needs of the people, and to give answers and solutions to the many grave problems which confront our Christianity in the great centers of our people.[59]

Ransom's Institutional Church became a radical institution in which recitals, lectures, and political organizing took place. From the pulpit, he attacked the policy racket, gambling, prostitution, and economic injustice. Ransom believed that the Church's mission was to speak to

[58] Ransom, Reverdy Cassius, and Anthony Pinn. 1999. *Making the Gospel Plain*. Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.
[59]Ibid.

the lived realities of the Black community. In a Quadrennial address to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Ransom states:

> I see little hope for the survival of the A.M.E. Church, or any other distinctly religious Negro denomination if we do not so apply the gospel of Christ as to make it a vital force in the life of society. While the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League may argue, petition, protest, and appeal, we are clothed with authority to declare, Thus saith the Lord.[60]

Conservative elements of the A.M.E. Church, believing that Ransom was too focused on earthly needs rather than the salvation of souls, forbade members from taking communion at Ransom's church or from participating in events the Institutional Church sponsored. In 1907, Ransom was assigned to the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Harlem. In his initial sermon to that church, Ransom Outlined his views on the role of the Black Church in regard to matters of justice:

> During Reverdy's first sermon at Bethel, he assured the congregation that he was not only there to pastor the church but also to attend to "the larger life and needs of the city."He recognized that the "moral and social redemption" of Negroes had been left up to the race itself and especially the Negro churches and clergy who must "courageously lead the people to grapple with the work of their rescue and upbuilding." He assured them that he was not the lackey of either the church or state in that he did his own thinking. In terms of civil rights he would "vigorously oppose the enemies and betrayers of the race" and would fight for every right that belonged to the Negro under the Constitution. "He would make his pulpit as large as the varied civic, social, moral and spiritual interests of the people in the community and cooperate with all forces without as well as within the church for the upbuilding of the people.[61]

Bethel Church became known as the “Actors Church,” as Ransom welcomed the marginalized, married interracial couples, campaigned against social injustices, and grew his congregation to

[60] Ibid.
[61] Gomez-Jefferson, Annetta. 2013. *The Sage of Tawawa : Reverdy Cassius Ransom, 1861-1959*. Ashland: The Kent State University Press. Accessed October 31, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

3,000 members. In August of 1913, Ransom would establish the Church of St. Simon the Cyrene in a storefront in Harlem as another Institutional-style congregation. Focusing on the poor, Ransom sought to develop a radical congregation that would meet the intellectual, spiritual, material, and emotional needs of the thousands of migrants arriving in Harlem daily. Heand his wife visited pool halls, saloons, houses of prostitution, and gambling joints to recruit members. They created a foodbank, supported local prostitutes, worked with police precincts, and welcomed other marginalized persons. Ransom's Institutional Church moved past traditional forms of church outreach to reimagine the church as a center for the community whose primary purpose was to embody the kingdom of God.

Henry Hugh Proctor

In the urban south at the turn of the twentieth century, as Reverdy Ransom responded to the needs of southern migrants, the Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor was developing an innovative ministry to serve the needs of Black Atlanta. Henry Hugh Proctor was the Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Atlanta. Born in the backwoods of Tennessee. Proctor graduated from Fisk University and Yale Divinity School and was the first African American minister of the First Congregational Church. Established by missionaries of the American Missionary Association after the Civil War, First Church was led by white Yale-educated clergy who established the Storrs School and later Atlanta University now Clark Atlanta University. Following his graduation from Yale Divinity School, Proctor preached a love ethic in the urban south and later in Brooklyn, NY. Proctor's theology of love provided an impetus for racial justice believing that African Americans through love could overcome the barriers of racial segregation and injustice. Proctor wrote in an address at Yale University, "Humility, fidelity, patience,

large-heartedness, love- this is Africa's contribution to Christianity."[62] Proctor believed that the Church would be the hope and salvation of the African American community.

As Ransom was developing his Institutional Church in Chicago, the Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor was developing the First Congregational Church of Atlanta as a progressive center of justice in the urban south. Arriving at First Church, the newly ordained Proctor sought to take his New England education back to where his people needed it the most. Beginning with 100 members it grew into a congregation of a thousand. Proctor in his first years organized the *National Convention of Congregational Workers Among the Colored People* and *The Young People's Congress.* In 1906 the Atlanta race massacre erupted destroying Black businesses, homes, colleges, and churches. The deaths of over twenty-five Black persons and the wounding of hundreds shook the Black community of Atlanta. Rev. Proctor led the way in healing the Black community in the wake of the massacre. Believing that God gave him a message for his people, Proctor believed that his call was to build a better Atlanta. Noticing that saloons and houses of prostitution were more attractive to people than the Church he sought to build a Church that was more attractive than the local saloon.

Proctor believed that an applied Christianity that dealt with spiritual and temporal matters would effectively alleviate the needs of the Black community. Proctor led his congregation in the construction of a new Institutional Church. First Congregational Church would dedicate a grand building that would be one the first of its kind including Sunday school classrooms, a library, a gymnasium, a kitchen, and showers. In his dedicatory sermon, he declared, "In this industrial temple we dedicated the pulpit and the parlor, the auditorium and the organ, the dumb-bell, and needle, the skillet, and the tub, to the glory of God and the redemption of a

[62] Proctor, Henry Hugh. *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches*. Freeport, NY: for Libraries, 1971. Print.

race."[63] After twenty-five years as Pastor of First Congregational Church, he joined the Great Migration. Believing that the Black Church was the only hope of his people he joined thousands of Black migrants who made their way from the South to the North to establish another institutional church, the Nazarene Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York.

J. Raymond Henderson

Some fifty years later the Rev. J. Raymond Henderson of Los Angeles would articulate a theology of hope and a praxis of liberation for migrants to California. Los Angeles was marketed as El Dorado, a promised land of wealth and opportunity for Black migrants who cameprimarily from Louisiana and Texas. Facing racial covenants, job discrimination, and other forms of injustice the sunny shores of Southern California still presented barriers to thriving Black communities. Born in 1898 in a log cabin in rural Virginia and raised in extreme poverty, J. Raymond Henderson enrolled in the Virginia Union Academy after primary school in Charlottesville, and then graduated from Virginia Union, Oberlin School of Theology, and Andover-Newton Theological School. Henderson wielded respectability politics, articulating a pragmatic hope that would liberate his people. Ordained in the National Baptist Convention in 1921 his denominational affiliation reflected not only his theological stances but a social-ethical orientation towards a pragmatic hope. Harvard historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham writes, “Race consciousness reached its apogee with the creation of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. in 1895. Determined to create a forum through which black people could voice their spiritual, economic, political, and social concerns, the convention’s leaders equated racial

[63] Proctor, Henry Hugh. *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches*. Freeport, NY: for Libraries, 1971. Print.

self-determination with black denominational hegemony."[64] By 1916, the National Baptist Convention would be the third largest religious body in the United States. Grounded in this theological tradition that emphasized Black nationalism, political pragmatism, social respectability, and racial uplift. Henderson preached a politics of respectability that emphasized self-improvement that would both combat white supremacy and uplift the race.

Having pastored some of the nation's leading Black Baptist congregations including Wheat Street Baptist Church in Atlanta, he was called to the wealthy and prestigious Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles in 1941. When J. Raymond Henderson arrived there, the congregation had a long-established history of social activism. The oldest Black Baptist congregation in the city was established by the primarily white First Baptist Church of Los Angeles. By the 1940s, Second Baptist had a congregation of over 900, with a sanctuary seating over 2,000. Second Baptist was at the heart of Black Los Angeles and was the flagship Black congregation for the city. Equivalent to Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, Friendship and Ebenezer Baptist Churches in Atlanta, Shiloh Baptist and Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington D.C., these congregations of the National Baptist Convention were class churches that proclaimed a gospel of social and racial uplift.

Second Baptist's Sanctuary, built in the 1920s by the noted Black architect Paul R. Williams, was designed to be a community center for Black Los Angeles. Serving as the site for the 1928 national meeting of the NAACP, its previous ministers had engaged in the struggle for racial justice in Los Angeles. As World War II emerged on the horizon, Henderson became a leader in the Double-V campaign. He opened Second Baptist Church to labor organizers as a

[64] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement In the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993. https://hdl-handle-net.libproxy2.usc.edu/2027/heb00476.0001.001. PDF.

space for mass meetings to protest racial discrimination in wartime industrial factories. He also supported mass meetings of Shipyard workers, NAACP protests against lynchings, and the American Youth for Democracy (the youth division of the American Communist Party). In 1951 Henderson, presented to the annual meeting of the NAACP, "A Suggested Strategy for Achievement of First Class American Citizenship," in which he argued that the rights of African Americans must be wrested from "oppressive majorities."[65] A proponent of the *social gospel*, Henderson articulated a theology that melded "theological orthodoxy, intellectual rigor, and oratorical skill."[66] Henderson facing the challenges that lay before the Black community cultivated a theology of hope. As Vincent Lloyd argues, "In other words, Christians are to be committed to a vision of the future in which goodness prevails, a time when violence and suffering end."[67] Henderson believed in a theology of hope and a praxis of liberation in which the longings for flourishing, justice, and goodness would overcome the stains of white supremacy.

As the Civil Rights movement unfolded, Henderson led Second Baptist in fundraising efforts to aid the movement in the South and hosted Malcolm X and Nation of Islam leaders in the wake of riots in 1962.

Sankofa: Looking Forward

As Black Churches in Los Angeles face the challenges of the 21st century,the battle of previous generations remains the same. The Black population of L.A. has declined to 8%, precipitated from economic recession, the impact of COVID-19 pandemice, the secularization of American society, domestic terrorism against Black communities, health inequities, and

[65] Neumann, David J. 2018. "A Respectable Militancy." *Southern California Quarterly*, no. 4: 471–504. https://doi.org/10.1525/scq.2018.100.4.471.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Lloyd, Vincent W. 2017. *Religion of the Field Negro*. Fordham Univ Press.

gentrification. The Black Church is faced with a multiplicity of crises. While attempting to give into despair, to stay the course as usual, or to remain irrelevant to the needs of its people. The Black Church, by recovering the spirit of Ransom, Proctor, and Henderson, can articulate and embody a new theology of hope. Vincent Lloyd writes, "that community is founded on the memory and real presence of Jesus Christ: the possibility for being Black to be resurrected."[68] The Black Church is a community founded upon the possibility of resurrection.The resurrection is more than a spiritual concept of life defeating death;it can be also embodied within the lives of individuals and communities. The forces of social, political, and economic death must not only be addressed, but also removed, so that new life and opportunities can be experienced in urban communities. While, urban renewal seeks to reimagine the city,it does not adequately seek to displace forces that lead to existential death for persons within these cities. The resurrection practices of Black churches seek to eradicate anything that inhibits the flourishing of persons. It challenges economic, social, and political practices that marginalize the oppressed. Through developing Institutional Churches that meet the spiritual, material, emotional, and physical needs of Black communities, the Black Church in Los Angeles can reclaim its relevance. Through developing affordable housing, partnering with governmental agencies, supporting community nonprofits and civic organizations, and serving as the host for Black communal organizations, the Institutional Church of the 21st century can once again become a sacred site of hope, liberation, and resistance.

[68] Lloyd, Vincent W. 2017. *Religion of the Field Negro*. Fordham Univ Press.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE ACTIVIST LEADER

This chapter aims to examine the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Ralph West as a model for Black pastoral leadership in light of the challenges posed by gentrification to Black churches and communities. Through interviews with Dr. West and an examination of revolutionary and diverse leadership forms, this chapter will first define leadership as posited by the New York Theological Seminary. Secondly, it will examine the Black pastor and leadership and the necessity for Black pastors to be leaders. The chapter will then explore the ministry of Dr. Ralph West as a contemporary model of Black pastoral leadership. It will then explore models of Pastoral leadership found in Eurocentric pastoral literature as compared to Dr. West's model of ministry. It will then examine the challenges of Black pastoral leadership and other models that have existed of Black pastoral leadership. The chapter will also explore the importance of mentorship to develop a response to issues of social justice. Lastly, it will explore other contemporary models of pastoral leadership by looking at the Rev. Marshall Mitchell of Salem Baptist Church in Abington, PA. It will conclude by articulating a new paradigm for Black pastoral leadership that can successfully be applied to the challenge of gentrification.

## Defining Leadership

Chapter Two explored historical models of Black pastoral leadership and how they addressed the systemic issues facing Black communities. This chapter explores contemporary models of Black pastoral leadership. Leadership is not an inherent trait. Leadership instead is something that is cultivated by experience, mentorship, study, and through the engagement of

circumstances that define one's ability to guide, direct, and cast vision for communities of persons. J. Oswald Sanders writes, "Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead."[69] Leadership within Black congregations is not only the ability to influence persons in the pews but also other players such as the community, politicians, and business enterprises to cast a positive vision for a neighborhood. Black pastors need resources to develop the necessary skills of leadership to guide their congregations to address the challenges that face their communities. According to New York Theological Seminary Competencies of ministry:

> A leader is one who creates an environment in which the gifts of the Spirit may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts, and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

Leaders are persons whose mode of being focuses on the flourishing and well-being of the persons and communities to which they have been encharged. Leadership as a core competency views the role of the minister as more than preaching and teaching; it also includes casting a vision for the life of the congregation and the community. Steven B. Sample argues that leadership can be both taught and learned.[70] Black pastors must be exposed to both historical and contemporary models of Black pastoral leadership that integrate matters of justice as central to the mission and ministry of the Black Church.

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[69] Sanders, J. Oswald. 2007. *Spiritual Leadership*. Moody Publishers.
[70] Sample, Steven B. *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership.* 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

## Models of Pastoral Leadership

To understand Black pastoral leadership, other approaches to ministry must be considered. We must understand various models of pastoral leadership. David T. Olson argues that a new model of Christian leadership is necessary to understand the various typologies of Christian leadership. In his text, *Discovering Your Leadership Style*, he emphasizes six different types of Christian leadership (Sacred, Relational, Inspirational, Building, Mission, and Imaginative).[71] Other models of pastoral leadership can be found in Henri Nouwen's *In The Name of Jesus,*Eugene Peterson's *The Contemplative Pastor,* and Alan Jones's *Sacrifice and Delight*, which offers up the model of Ministers as Fools, Storytellers, and Actors. While, for example, Nouwen emphasizes pastoring as shaped by humility that puts aside the need to be relevant, Peterson underscores contemplation and reflection. These descriptions of pastoral leadership, thoughhelpful, do not always provide frameworks that address the unique challenges facing Black pastors. These models of Eurocentric pastoring highlight the fears of white clergy no longer being the center of power and moving to the margins of society. The urgency of these crises facing the Black community does not allow room for Black preachers to merely be storytellers or persons who merely lead ritualistic acts on behalf of a congregation.

### The Black Pastor and Leadership

The Black Pastor has played an outsized role in the leadership of Black communal life in the United States. W.E.B. Dubois writing in *Of The Faith of the Fathers* states:

> The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a "boss;' an intriguer, an idealist,-all these he is, and ever, too, the center of

[71] Olson, D. T. (2014). *Discovering Your Leadership Style: The Power of Chemistry, Strategy and Spirituality*. InterVarsity Press.

> a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it. The type, of course, varies according to time and place, from the West Indies in the sixteenth century to New England in the nineteenth, and from the Mississippi bottoms to cities like New Orleans or New York.[72]

Serving as pastor, prophet, priest, and politician the black preacher navigated a multitude of worlds guiding the temporal and spiritual affairs of the Black community. Historically, churches were one of the centers of Black cultural life, providing spiritual, educational, and social uplift to the neighborhood. From the late 18th century until the 20th century the Black church was the center of Black communal life. Dubois writes, "The Negro church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character."[73] In the post-civil rights era, the Black Church is no longer the center of the Black community. The pastor once served as a griot, educator, activist, and spiritual advisor to the community. The Black preacher's voice has been sidelined by other Black leadership in academia, entertainment, politics, athletics, and business. Secularization and the decline of religious affiliation in American culture have led to a decline in the influence of Black pastors. The cultural and social arenas in which Black pastors once played a significant role have been reduced. The Black preacher is also no longer the most educated person in the congregation. As Anthony Pinn writes, "Highly trained professionals within the congregation made unrealistic the idea that the pastor is invariably the person best equipped to manage all aspects of the church's ministry."[74] Black Pastors can provide the leadership in the face of systemic issues affecting the Black community. Scholars such as Pinn and Cornel West suggest that a singular model of Black

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[72] Sernett, Milton C., ed. *African American Religious History : a Documentary Witness.* Second edition. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Pinn, Anthony B. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era.* Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002.

pastoral leadership is no longer tenable: “furthermore, as Cornel West points out, charismatic leadership is usually developed at the expense of grass-roots organizing.”[75] Pinn further argues that collective leadership allows Black churches to thrive. Shared leadership models are important in the governance of Black Churches. However, shared leadership cannot cast a vision nor is it the central voice from a pulpit weekly. The failures of the Black Lives Matter movement, which focused on a shared leadership model, highlight the importance of focused and developed leaders who can guide and sustain movements. While the Black Lives Matter movement garnered media attention, marches by thousands of participants, and raised millions of dollars., it failed to create changes within political and economic policy. Instead, the rise of Anti-DEI movements has countered what little attention to injustice the movement raised. The Black Church, while no longer the center of the Black community, still plays a pivotal role in the life of Black communities. Black pastors still can rally parishioners, community members, and other partners around issues that pertain to the lives of their communities.

Black pastoral leadership is necessary to effectively address matters of social justice. The Black pastor is still needed as a griot, educator, activist, sage, and advisor. The question remains: what is the role of the Black pastor in facing the changes and challenges of the 21st century? How can Black pastors cast a vision to speak to the challenges of the modern era? What unique qualities of being, mentorship, self-reflection, and leadership are needed to provide life-giving and spiritually and socially renewing ministry in the 21st century Black communities? For the focus of this study, how can Black pastors effectively challenge gentrification and cast hope for urban life in Black communities?

[75] Ibid.

The Challenges of Black Pastoral Leadership

The Black church currently faces a multiplicity of challenges that demand unique forms of pastoral leadership. The post-civil rights era has offered a different challenge to both the Black Pastor and Black Churches. When the Black Lives Matter movement emerged, many activists declared, "this is not your grandmother's civil rights movement." The challenges of the 21st century have framed a precarious future for the Black Church, and particularly for urban Black churches facing gentrification, shifting political clout and authority, racism, sexism, post-COVID-19, and socio-economic stratification. In light of these challenges, what qualities of leadership, personhood, and self-reflection are needed to provide transformative ministry and communal leadership to Black communities?

Models of Black Pastoral Leadership

In their groundbreaking text ,*The Black Church in African American Experience,* C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya write, "But for African Americans freedom has always been communal in nature."[76] The struggle of the Black Church has been one of engaging in the communal liberation of the Black community. However, the Black Community in the 21st century is diverse. The challenge of the Black Church as an institution in the 21st century is faced by the initial question of who is the Black Community. The Black experience in America is composed of African Americans, Afro-Caribbean, Latinx, African, and other diasporic communities. The Black community is also shaped by socio-economic stratification, urban vs. rural, and regional and geographical differences. As argued in the book *What Has This Got to Do with the Liberation of Black People?: The Impact of Ronald W. Walters on African American*

[76] Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press.

*Thought and Leadership,* the African American community is unified, yet diverse.[77] Facing a multiplicity of challenges ranging from secularization to gentrification of urban communities, there is no singular approach to how Black Pastoral leaders can create or engage an agenda for communal liberation in the Black Community. However, all Black Pastors must ask how can Black persons and communities can thrive in the 21st century. What role must the church play in providing meaning-making, community, and holistic well-being to our local community? How can the local church pivot as cities are shaped by gentrification and lose African-American residents to remain the cultural womb of the Black community?

Black Pastoral Leadership In Practice

The prophet, priest, and sage model of Black pastoral leadership serves as the most effective model for Black pastors to embody their calling. Some pastors, such as Dr. Ralph West, embody all three roles in their pastoral leadership. There are particular strengths for each pastor. Some pastors are more prophets than priests, some are more sage than prophet. However, Black pastors serving within these roles as prophets, priests, and sages strengthen Black churches and the Black community.

As focused upon in chapter two. Black Pastors have served as prophetic agents. The Black Educator-Preacher or Black Preacher-Politician has been a particular form of Black prophetic leadership. As Dr. West stated, the prophet serves not merely in word but through their actions in building up communities. The Black educator-preacher or Black preacher-politician utilized "secular" and "sacred" vocations to lift the race and advance the cause of racial justice. Black educator-preachers such as Bishop Daniel Payne of the A.M.E. Church, founder of

[77] Smith, Robert C., Cedric Johnson, and Robert G. Newby. 2014. *What Has This Got to Do with the Liberation of Black People?* SUNY Press.

Wilberforce University, Rev. Dr. Harry V. Richardson, who was President of Gammon Theological Seminary and the first president of the Interdenominational Theological Center. Rev. Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor, President of North Carolina A&T University and Virginia Union University and later Pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. His successor the Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts was simultaneously pastor of Abyssinian and President of S.U.N.Y. Old Westbury. Other historic models of Black Preacher-Educators are Rev. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, President of Howard University, and Rev. Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, President of Morehouse College. Black pastor-educators such as Elder Blair T. Hunt of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, TN served simultaneously as a pastor and school principal, inspiring his congregation to pursue both educational access and spiritual freedom. Contemporary models such as Dr. Lakeesha Walrond, President of New York Theological Seminary and Preaching Pastor at First Corinthians Baptist Church, and Dr. Willie Dwayne Francois III, Associate Professor at New York Theological Seminary and Senior Pastor of Fountain Baptist Church continue the prophetic ministry model of Preacher-Educators.

The Black pastor has also served as a politician, as seen in the lives of AME Preachers, Bishop Henry Turner who served in the Georgia Legislature, and Revs. Archibald Carey Sr. and Jr. in Chicago. Congresspersons and Pastors - Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, Rev. Floyd Flake of Greater Allen Cathedral A.M.E. Church in New York, Rev. William H. Gray of Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia. Currently, the Rev. Senator Raphael G.Warnock of Georgia serves as the preeminent example of the Black Preacher-Politician. These persons utilized political processes to advance the prophetic role of the Black Church.

Black pastors have also been priests, sages, and prophets as they built institutions, planted churches, and innovative new forms of ministry. The Rev. Mary G. Evans of the Cosmopolitan Community Church of Chicago, the Rev. Johnie Colemon of Christ Universal Temple of Chicago, and the Rev. James H. Robinson of the Presbyterian Church of the Master in Harlem represent historical models of Black pastoral leadership grounded in institution-building through creating new churches that functioned as community hubs to serve the holistic needs of African American persons.

A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Leadership in the context of the Black Church is guided by Ephesians 4:13:he ministry of the Black pastor is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." The equipping ministry of the Black pastor includes not merely matters deemed as spiritual/religious, but also the political, social, mental, physical, and occupational needs of their congregations and communities. Jeffrey Tribble quotes W.E.B. Dubois in his book *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*:

> The Negro minister needs to know and do more than preach and pray. He must be possessed of public spirit and have the capacity to cooperate in educational and other social movements which promise present as well as prospective salvation. He must fit himself to preach and also practice the scripture that hath the promise of the life that now is as well as that which is to come.[78]

Black pastoral leadership is guided by a sensitivity to the needs of the people and, in the words of Dr. Lakeesha Walrond, treats the needs of the people as holy. Such ministry is guided by a leadership that takes seriously the role of the pastor not only as a priest, but also as prophet, teacher, and activist. Guided by this model, the Black Pastor views their ministry as caretaker of

[78] Tribble, J.. *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

the soul of their congregations, communities, and cities. Tribble writes, “Transformative pastoral leaders tend to “the soul of a congregation” while building the congregation’s capacity to address the concerns of the broader community.”[79] By caring for their congregations, Black pastors cast a vision that also speaks to the needs of the communities around them. The 21st century poses unique challenges to Black churches as the post-civil rights movement and post-Obama eras have led to a decline in religious engagement, as well as other challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, gentrification, and the Black Lives Matters Movement. Historical models as presented in Chapter Two, while effective, do not provide a comprehensive model for modern Black pastors. The Rev. Dr. Ralph West, Senior Pastor of Brookhollow Baptist Church, “The Church Without Walls,” serves as a model of Black pastoral leadership that effectively engages the needs of a changing Black populace.

Dr. Ralph West as Contemporary Model

Dr. West is a native of Houston, Texas, and a graduate of Bishop College in Dallas. There he earned a Bachelor's degree in Religion and Philosophy. He earned a Master of Divinity with Biblical Languages from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. West is the founding pastor of the Brookhollow Baptist Church, "The Church Without Walls," in Houston. Dr. West was serving as a 27-year-old pastor of a congregation that was enduring significant conflict. Following a significant time in prayer, Dr. West felt led to plant a new congregation. On November 6, 1987, with 32 founding members, Pastor West established Brookhollow at his home on Joy Street in Northeast Houston.[80] The first worship service was

[79] Ibid.
[80] Our History | The Church Without Walls. n.d. The Church Without Walls | Church in Houston, TX. Accessed October 25, 2023. https://churchwithoutwalls.org/history/.

held at the Brookhollow Marriott Hotel on November 8, 1987. Within the congregation's first year, 250 people began to attend each week. The congregation, as the only Black church within their area, grew rapidly, and, in November of 1988, purchased the former building of the Houston Business Journal as their first permanent sanctuary. The congregation grew to 1,500 persons weekly. By 1989, they added a second service and ,by 1992, a third. In May of 1997, a new sanctuary was built, and the church was named "The Church Without Walls," based upon a sermon series preached by Dr. West. This concept envisioned a congregation not bound by geographical boundaries or social location, but presents the limitless possibilities of God. In 200,2 a second campus was added to Brookhollow, leading the congregation to become a multi-site church. In 2014, "the cathedral" a 3,800-seat sanctuary was dedicated. Under Dr. West's leadership, it has grown to a congregation of 24,000 plus members across three locations each Sunday. Prior to the outbreak of theCOVID-19 pandemic, up to 9,000 people a week attended worship at Brookhollow.

Dr. West is known widely in preaching circles as one of America's foremost biblical expositors and preachers. Most interviews of Dr. West, such as in Preaching Magazine, PreachingToday, and video interviews with the Rev. H.B. Charles, have focused on Dr. West's legacy as a preacher and biblical expositor. Little attention, however, has been paid to Dr. West as a model for strategic planning, leadership, and church development.

Dr. West's Model of Pastoral Leadership

In interviewing Dr. West regarding the primary influences on his leadership style, Dr. West described various typologies of Black pastors and how they shaped his ministry utilizing the Sage, Pastor, and Priest framework described by Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert of the Howard

University School of Divinity.[81] Dr. West experienced these models of ministry through a mentoring relationship with his childhood, college, and adult pastors, who provided first-hand wisdom and examples of how to embody their particular style of pastoral leadership.

The first typology of Black pastoral leadership Dr. West described was the pastor as a priest. The pastor as a priest is focused, as he defines, it as caring for the community's spiritual well-being and its relationship with and to God. The Rev. O.C. Johnson, the pastor of the Lyons Unity Baptist Church, which was his family's church, served as the first model of the pastor as a priest for Dr. West, and proved formative to his spiritual formation. . He was baptized, licensed, ordained, and married there, and it shaped his fundamental understanding of pastoral identity. According to Dr. West, Rev. Johnson utilized language to shape the congregation's identity, calling them "beloved" and "my dears." This image of the pastor as a priest can be seen in the life of Jesus in John 21:17, when Jesus shapes Peter's identity as a pastor by calling him to feed his sheep. The pastor, as a priest, is concerned with the feeding of the flock by building upon their relationship with and to God. In his preaching, Dr. West embodies the priestly role of the Pastor. Dr. West ,in an interview with Preaching magazine, states:

> I think in preaching we have to understand these people to whom we preach are God's creation, regardless of who they are. It's not our responsibility to judge or condemn them, but really to preach lovingly with grace and let Christ call them. One thing I have learned is that when people respond to Jesus, they come under conviction. That's judgment enough.[82]

The priestly role of the Pastor is to remind parishioners of their belovedness. In a world where Black persons are faced with constant indignities, the Pastor as Priest reminds their parishioners

[81] Gilbert, Kenyatta R. *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*. Fortress Press, 2011.
[82] Duduit, Michael. 2011. "Preaching Beyond the Walls: An Interview with Ralph Douglas West - Sermons & Articles." Preaching.Com. April 14, 2011. https://www.preaching.com/articles/preaching-beyond-the-walls-an-interview-with-ralph-douglas-west/.

that they belong to God. This is a form of Afro-Humanist preaching that affirms that Black persons are made in the *Imago Dei*, or image of God. Priestly preaching calls forth the dignity and worth of parishioners and reminds them of their relationship with and to the living God.

Priestly preaching and pastoring affirms not only the worth of persons but also summons them forth into a different way of being. Dr. West's second model is the pastor as a prophet, as illustrated by his mentor/mentee relationship with the Rev. Floyd D. Harris of the Mount Tabor Baptist Church in Dallas. Dr. West described Rev. Harris as and excellent pastor first and foremost, rather than as a skilled preacher.. However, Rev. Harris's ministry model was one of priest and prophet. Mount Tabor had a million-dollar budget in the 1970s, and though not the largest church in Dallas, it was one of the healthiest. Rev. Harris built a foundation that provided loans to churches to finance their building projects when banks would not fund them. With 1,500 members and three services weekly, Mount Tabor established a school that generated $700-800,000 dollars a year. Rev. Harris shaped Dr. West's understanding of church planting and the necessity for the pastor to pray for the church and become community-responsible by being engaged in the whole life of the people. The pastor as a prophet does not necessarily have to include prophetic rhetoric in their weekly preaching,  but leads their Church to be engaged in the community's life in which it finds itself located. In an interview with *Preaching* magazine, Dr. West affirms the prophetic role of preaching as moving from the priestly responsibility to challenging the congregation to move into the behavioral demands of the gospel.

> Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, but at the same time faith without works is dead—it's just not going to work. I think that's the balance. Grace initiates our relationship with God, and then as a result we live that grace out by following the teachings of Jesus Christ. One of the great commands I've been thinking about during the past few months is when Jesus says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's a powerful statement. I

> live with that word, and I think about what it really means to love my neighbor as I love myself.[83]

Prophetic preaching and pastoring lead pastors to ask themselves and their congregations how to move from love of self to love of neighbor. What does the love of neighbor mean and what form does it take? As gentrification poses a major challenge to Black communities, prophetic preaching and pastoring asks what does it mean to love this neighborhood, this community, and those who do not have access to power? It also includes asking how we love both the agents of gentrification and current residents of this neighborhood, and seek the flourishing and well-being of all people.

Dr. West's last model of ministry was embodied by his relationship as the pastor as Sage with the Rev. Dr. A. Louis Patterson of the Mount Corinth Baptist Church in Houston. Dr. Patterson served as the defining mentor for Dr. West's ministry model. Dr. Patterson identified gifts in Dr. West and pushed him to utilize the gifts within him. For example, Dr. Patterson had Dr. West substitute as a guest preacher for him at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn,. an experience that would be a catalyst for Dr. West's national ministry. Dr. Thomas Long writes, "The pulpit is itself a place that blends closeness and distance, and, as such, it can be a place where what Daloz calls "the magic" of mentoring can take place."[84] Dr. Patterson, like a sage, utilized the pulpit as a place for mentoring Dr. West and displaying how a preacher should embody themselves within the pulpit and how they lead and serve their congregations.

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Long, Thomas. 2018. “The Preacher as Mentor - Outreachmagazine.Com.” Outreachmagazine.Com. outreachmagazine.com. July 12, 2018. https://outreachmagazine.com/resources/books/discipleship-and-spiritual-growth-books-and-media/31490-the-preacher-as-mentor.html.

Dr. West describes the pastor as a prophet, priest, and sage because these typologies of Black pastoral leadership do not have to be divided; instead, they are gifts that pastors can embody at different points of their lives and ministries. Black pastors as priests, prophets, and sages provide a holistic ministry first, within which the dignity and worth of Black persons are affirmed. Secondly, parishioners are then challenged to ask, who is my neighbor? How do we live out the implications of the gospel? Lastly, the wisdom of the larger Black traditions through literature, art, music, and the mentoring of ancestors and community shapes the congregation and inspires them toward a new future. The prophet, priest, and sage model take the unique personalities of persons seriously while also emphasizing the responsibility of Black preachers not only to their congregation but also to their communities.

Mentoring the Black Pastor

The social justice issues facing Black pastors can be overwhelming. Black pastors need support and guidance to navigate challenges such as gentrification. Mentoring, particularly from older pastors, can provide effective models for ministry that can be provided for younger clergy through first-hand experience. If the challenges of the 21st century are going to be met in the Black Church,the wisdom of seasoned elders who have faced the urban renewal of the ‘60s, the war on drugs of the ‘80s, and the Black Lives Matter movement of the 2000s is needed. Mentoring provides a Sankofa experience in which, to move the Church forward, we look backward. The mentoring relationship may be a direct mentor/mentee relationship, such as Dr. West had with Rev. Harris and Dr. Patterson, or it can be provided through the witness of sermons and preaching, as seen by Rev. Johnson, or it can be engaged through books, podcasts, and other forms of media.

The mentoring models of pastor, sage, and priest as provided to Dr. West enabled him to plant the Brookhollow Baptist Church. These Black pastoral leadership models inspired Dr. West to develop a unique model of ministry at Brookhollow. In planting the congregation, Dr. West led as a priest:he developed a primary focus on strong preaching and worship addressing the spiritual needs of the people and guiding their relationship with God and one another. Dr. West's philosophy of preaching is his primary drive as the pastor of Brookhollow. An expository preacher, Dr. West seeks to connect the bible to the lived realities of his congregation. As the congregation grew through strategic planning, Dr. West led as Prophet and Priest. Through strong preaching, he encouraged the congregation to engage the community in which Brookhollow found itself. This emphasis on holistic discipleship enabled the Church to focus on an embodied gospel that transformed congregants' lives into disciples of Jesus. Lastly, as a sage, Dr. West is now pouring himself into the next generation of pastors and preachers to mentor them as they prepare to serve the needs of their communities and generations. Through the development of the IC3 Conference in Houston and South Africa, thousands of preachers are exposed to Dr. West's model of pastoral leadership. The conference provides participants the opportunity to learn from him as well as the nation's leading Black pastors. Additionally, he provides support for students at several seminaries across the country.

Other Contemporary Models

The ministry of the Rev. Dr. Ralph West of the Brookhollow Baptist Church, "The Church Without Walls," serves as a contemporary model for revolutionary Black pastoral leadership. It is also a model that can be replicated. The prophet, priest, and sage can be adapted regardless of denominational, regional, social, and theological context. A model of Dr. West's typology is displayed in the ministry and leadership of The Rev. Marshall Paul Hughes Mitchell

of the Salem Baptist Church of Abington, Pennsylvania. He provides a current model for effective pastoral ministry in which the Black Church can reclaim its role in the 21st century as the cultural womb of the Black community. Rev. Mitchell is a native of Philadelphia, and descended from a line of preachers and educators active in the historic Black communities in that city. A graduate of Howard University and Union Theological Seminary, Rev. Mitchell has served as the Senior Pastor of Salem Baptist Church for the last ten years. With a diverse career background, having served in politics, education, and media, Rev. Mitchell was initially called to the historic Salem Baptist Church as a preacher in residence. Through that experience, having received a call to the congregation, he was ordained, and Salem became his first pastoral call.

Salem Baptist Church and Black Renewal

Salem Baptist Church was founded in 1884 a historic congregation with a long legacy of cultural and civic leadership; Rev. Mitchell has led its revival into a modern Institutional Church. With a congregation of over 1,400 members, yet still anchored in the traditional worship experiences of the Black Church, it has balanced innovation with tradition. In describing the challenges facing the Black Church in the 21st century, Rev. Mitchell argues – much like C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, Dr. Raphael Warnock, and Dr. Eddie Glaude – that there is no singular Black Church, but Black Churches in America. The traditional Black Church, or the liberationist stream of the Black Church, Rev. Mitchell argues, lost its way after the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. As a generation of Activist Pastors and Preachers retired and the gains of the 1980s electoral successes passed, the Black Church has been searching for a cause to make it relevant again, while facing intergenerational challenges between those who engaged in the struggle for civil rights, and millennials and Gen Z who have declared, “This is not their grandparent’s movement.” Leadership transitions within churches, a post-church demographic

shift, and global realities such as COVID-19, economic injustice, and gentrification, have also impacted the Black church.

Rev. Mitchell argues that the Black Church is in a period of transition and trouble, as it has become a rebel without a cause. Black theologians and scholars such as Dr. Anthony Pinn and Dr. Eddie Glaude have also highlighted the tenuous future of the Black Church. Rev. Mitchell believes that the Black Church must spot the next wave and re-engage its reason for existing. He argues that, having forgotten its history and unsure of how to engage its future, the Black Church is facing the perfect storm. If the Black Church is going to survive, then a new model of pastoral leadership is needed. Dr. Andrea Gillepsie, a political scientist, argues that a factionalized form of Black leadership is needed, one which seeks the communal welfare of Black persons but that also speaks to the particularities facing unique Black Communities.[85] Contemporary Black Preachers such as Rev. Mitchell offer through their ministries a means of honoring the diversity of the Black Community while still engaging in the liberation of all Black persons.

Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert Howard University School of Divinity utilizes the model of the Sage, Pastor, and Priest to describe the role of the Black Pastor.[86] Rev. Mitchell argues that the Black pastor must serve in that vein as Pastor and Priest. As a priest, the pastor must go before God on behalf of the people. However, the pastor must also be a prophet willing not only to critique the systems of injustice oppressing the Black Community, but also willing to engage in

[85] Smith, Robert C. (Robert Charles), Cedric Johnson, and Robert G. Newby. *What Has This Got to Do with the Liberation of Black People? : The Impact of Ronald W. Walters on African American Thought and Leadership.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
[86]Gilbert, Kenyatta R. *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*. Fortress Press, 2011.

self-critique and, much like the biblical prophets, call the people back into repentance and self-examination.

Rev. Mitchell argues that the modern Black pastor must see their blind spots and those of the Black community while also challenging systems of oppression. The leadership of the Black pastor and their preaching must not only be relevant, but also move from theory into practice. Salem Baptist Church, under Rev. Mitchell's leadership, has embodied the movement from theory into praxis. During Rev. Mitchell's tenure, they outgrew their previous building, purchasing a 10-acre campus in suburban Philadelphia. During the COVID pandemic, the congregation also purchased a second church from a historically white congregation and leased the building back to them. Salem has also developed innovative ministries, including community vaccinations during the pandemic, a greenbook of 300 businesses owned by church members, and partnerships with a farm to provide access to healthy foods. Under Rev. Mitchell's leadership of the congregation, the Church has grown from 50 members to more than 1,400.[87] However, that growth has not been fostered by focusing on church growth or new multimedia worship, but fby ocusing on the needs of the people and the communal welfare of the Black community. Rev. Mitchell and the Salem Baptist Church have developed an innovative ministry that serves the unique needs of the Black community in Philadelphia.

[87] Bailey, Samaria. 2019. "Salem Baptist Church: Creating a Vision from a New Site | Religion | Phillytrib.Com." The Philadelphia Tribune. https://www.facebook.com/PhillyTrib. April 13, 2019. https://www.phillytrib.com/religion/salem-baptist-church-creating-a-vision-from-a-new-site/article_96a58927-2017-5484-81ba-03868629bb94.html.

Towards a New Black Pastoral Model of Leadership

As the Black church faces the unique challenges of the 21st century, the model of the pastor as prophet,  priest, and sage is embodied in the example of Rev. Ralph West. Dr. West provides a template that can be replicated as witnessed in the ministry of Rev. Mitchell in Philadelphia. As a prophet, priest, and sage, the Black pastor can once again engage in relevant ministry that meets the needs of their community. Likewise, the Black pastor can reclaim their role as a community leader. By engaging in care for the minds, bodies, and souls of persons, and by treating their needs as holy, the Black Church can once again claim its role as the cultural womb of the Black community.

# CHAPTER 4

## THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter justifies gentrification as a theological issue. Gentrification is not merely a matter of class dynamics, changing neighborhoods, or the replacement of locally owned stores by corporate stores. Tackling challenging matters of social justice should not be done haphazardly. A moral, ethical, and spiritual vision is needed to understand our relationship to cities. Gentrification is not just a political, social, or cultural issue, but a theological one. Guided by the core competencies of New York Theological Seminary, this chapter begins with the *Black pastor as Theologian.* The pastor as theologian defines the activity of pastors as those who engage in biblical and theological reflection for the sake of others. The pastor as theologian engages pastors in the task of defining for their congregations biblical and theological rationales for addressing gentrification. The next section, the *Bible and the City,* provides a biblical vision for the importance of the city and the God-bearing capacity of cities. This section reflects on the role of the city in scripture as a place where God dwells. Theology and place explores theological rationales for the importance of place. Grounded in the doctrine of creation and the New Jerusalem of revelation this chapter explores the relationship between Christian tradition, the local, and the global. Lastly, the chapter closes with philosophical frameworks that undergird this project. This project articulates an Afro-Christian humanism grounded in Kuyperian philosophy, Black humanist traditions, and the Black Social Gospel. Concerning race, throughout this document, we will use the term Black to refer to people of the African Diaspora and to such populations that reside within the United States. To some, African Americans are a subgroup

within the larger Black community. Since our discussion purposely includes those who may be first-generation immigrants or who, for whatever reason, do not identify as African American, we employ the term "Black." Furthermore, we capitalize it to distinguish the racial category and related identity from the color. Similarly, we capitalize the word White when referring to race.

## The Black Pastor as Theologian

What role do Black churches in Los Angeles have in addressing gentrification from a biblical and theological perspective? What spiritual, ethical, biblical, and theological resources can Black communities draw upon to ascertain the challenges confronting them, as well as effectively minister to those around them? To develop fruitful ministry in the face of social crises, competencies of ministry must be developed to assist a minister in addressing the lived needs of their communities of call. Like the Sons of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32 who sought to understand the times and knew what Israel should do, the Black pastor must develop competency as a theologian to understand the times and what the Church should do. For this project, according to the New York Theological Seminary competencies of ministry, "a theologian engages actively in biblical study and theological reflection in the context of the contemporary world, in an effort to continue to grow and become more effective in interpreting the word in a particular time and place." The pastor as theologian is not a summons for all Black clergy to receive formal theological education, though it is helpful and in many cases necessary. However, all pastors need to think theologically. It is essential for the pastor as theologian to think and engage in study and reflection that brings scripture to bear upon the realities of life.

The book of Ephesians reminds those called to ministry that the primary task of preaching is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."[88] The Black pastor as theologian must be equipped and go about the task of equipping their congregations to address crises spiritual, personal, and societal from a biblical and theological perspective. The question before the Black pastor is to ask, what is the situation before me and what does God have to say about it? What insights do scripture, tradition, and experience bring to the challenge of bringing effective practices to assess, confront, or change the situation at hand? How does one think of God, creation, the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how does the gospel speak to the lived realities of persons? Howard Thurman asked this poignant question in *Jesus and the Disinherited:* "Is there any help to be found for the disinherited in the religion of Jesus?*"*[89] If Black churches are to effectively engage gentrification, their approach must be grounded in a biblical, theological, and philosophical perspective that articulates the hope that there is help to be found in the Christian witness.

Theological reflection on gentrification empowers pastors to provide a biblical, ethical, moral, and historical rationale for why their congregations must develop innovative strategies to address gentrification within their communities. Theological and biblical reflection, followed by decisive action, separates the church from other social/non-profit organizations that are engaged in the work of addressing gentrification. One can act upon issues of social challenge, but it is only the church that can ask, what does the gospel of Jesus have to say to the world around us? The Black pastor must respond to the question "Is there a word from the Lord?" Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor writes, "The key question the Pastor should raise is the one raised by Immanuel Kant and his "categorical imperative": what kind of world would it be if everyone behaved as I

[88] Ephesians 4:12 (ESV)
[89] Thurman, Howard. 1996. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon Press.

do? Extending the person and precepts of Christ into every corner of our lives calls us to participate in improving the quality of life for all."[90] The Black pastor serves as an organic intellectual or public theologian. The Black pastor realizes that ideas can give shape to new realities – that the realm of preaching, teaching, baptizing, and witnessing is the articulation of new worlds that can be formed. Defining public theology, Adam L. Bond writes, "public theology is the way in which a theologian represents a theological perspective in the public sphere in order to converse with and/or influence public-policy considerations."[91] As theologians, Black pastors do not resign themselves to despair in the face of the forces that lead to gentrification or other forms of injustice. Instead, they posit new possibilities – God's possibilities for the world. These possibilities influence public policy through direct and indirect action. Regarding public theology in the evangelical church Kevin J Vanhoozer writes,, "The organic intellectual knows that ideas matter—they have the power to give shape to certain forms of life. But the organic intellectual is less an abstract theorist and more a social activist, one who organizes and preserves the integrity of the church as the city of God by helping congregations to read cultures and adopt practices befitting citizens of the gospel."[92] As a theologian, the Black pastor is a social activist who speaks to the longings of their people. They help their congregations to not only read the culture, but also to cultivate and generate new cultures. Through sermons, bible studies, blog posts, op-eds, liturgy, and newsletters, the Black pastor forms a "pulpit theology." Through the Word both written and spoken, the Black pastor can shape the consciousness of their people. Preaching for the Black pastor is an inherently political

[90] Proctor, Samuel D, and Gardner C Taylor. 1996. *We Have This Ministry : The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.
[91]Bond, Adam L. *The Imposing Preacher*. Fortress Press, 2013.
[92] Wilson, Todd, and Hiestand, Gerald L., eds. 2016. *Becoming a Pastor Theologian : New Possibilities for Church Leadership*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press. Accessed September 1, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

act. Through the proclaimed word, they engage in the conscientization of their congregations. Dr. Olin P Moyd writes in *The Sacred Art: preaching & theology in the African American Tradition*:

> The interpretation and proclamation of the gospel from the African American traditional pulpits of the past provided hope for the victims. It also spoke with great fortitude to the sinful social structures and the perpetrators of an unjust social and economic system. It impelled the victims to rise up and participate in God's plan for their redemption. It condemned sin and negative behaviors in the lives of individuals, but it also condemned the evil social structure that caused and allowed to exist conditions that preyed upon the dispossessed.[93]

The challenges of gentrification are daunting. The questions of how cities operate, who lives in them, who has access to capital, good education, a livable income, and affordable homes, may not appear to be theological issues. The Black pastor may feel overwhelmed by the enormity of challenges presented by gentrification. They may simply be focused on keeping the lights on in the church and the bills paid, and simplytrying to survive. The local pastor may not be an expert on economic theory, the history of urban planning, redlining, or social justice. A crisis of displacement, shrinking congregations, economic injustice, and secularization, in addition to other social, and theological challenges and denominational decline, are just a handful of the crises facing Black churches in urban centers.

However, the Black pastor is an expert. The voice of the Black pastor in the face of gentrification is not only vital, it is necessary. As Vanhoozer writes, "The pastor theologian is rather *a generalist who specializes in relating all things to the gospel of Jesus Christ*. Pastors are local public theologians—organic intellectuals who represent the mind of Christ in order to

[93] Moyd, Olin P. 1995. *The Sacred Art : Preaching & Theology in the African American Tradition.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

animate, and watch over, local assemblies of Christ's body."[94] Through biblical and theological reflection, the Black pastor is an organic intellectual who can both provide hope and speak truth to power. Dr. Moyd writes:

> This African American preaching tradition could provide some light in the dark and dismal situation in America today if the powers that be would take heed. They must take heed because the doom of the cities is the doom of the nations.The African American preaching tradition will not only provide hope for the secularized and the ghettoized dispossessed of our nation, it will point out new directions for the transformation of an unjust economic system. The choices are clear.

The Black pastor as a theologian must give heed to clear thought on biblical, theological, moral, and ethical issues. Through reflection on the doctrines of the incarnation, ecclesiology, creation/place of love and hope, and human dignity/value, the pastor brings the tools of the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear upon social crisis. Vanhoozer continues in his essay, "The mandate of the public intellectual is to speak meaningfully about broad topics of ultimate social concern and to address central issues about what it means to flourish as human individuals and communities."[95] Like the biblical prophets, the Black pastor wrestles on behalf of the people with God, articulating a theology of hope amid exile. They ask, how do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?  Through the preached word, they ask, How do humans live in right relationship with God and one another?" Describing the life and ministry of Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor, Adam Bond writes:

> He held that the gospel of Christ is a response to the community's issues. Therefore, it is important that the preacher give meaning to the gospel for the contemporary setting. The preacher must be equipped to "transpose" the message of the gospel for the modern mind.

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[94] Wilson, Todd, and Hiestand, Gerald L., eds. 2016. *Becoming a Pastor Theologian : New Possibilities for Church Leadership*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press. Accessed September 1, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.
[95] Ibid.

> The modern person does not live among sheep and goats, so preachers must give meaning to parables and environments that are foreign to their listeners.[96]

The minister as a theologian responds to Jesus' call to feed his sheep.The minister gives meaning to environments that are foreign to their listeners. Drawing upon the resources of scripture and church tradition, the Black pastor can articulate the longings, hopes, fears, grief, and possibilities that lay before their congregations.

The Bible and the City

From what wells do Black pastors draw the strength from which to engage in the city? Sermons, hymns, art, and literature serve as important resources for the making of good public theology. The Biblical narrative serves as the foundation for theological reflection. The Bible serves as the primary source for the articulation of prophetic hope.

Place matters within the Biblical tradition. God operates within the materiality of creation, cities, and human flesh. Scripture pays attention to places naming cities, earth, water, sky, and other material matter as sites of encounter with God. Genesis 1:31 states, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."[97] Dr. Willie James Jennings writes, "A Christian doctrine of creation is first a doctrine of place and people, of divine love and divine touch, of human presence and embrace, and of divine and human interaction…Christianity is in need of a place to be fully Christian."[98] Christians are not meant to be consumers or passive observers of the environments in which they dwell. Christians affirm the goodness of creation and God's good intentions for creation. Christians affirm that the material – concrete and steel, gardens and roadways, urban lanes, coffee shops, storefronts, and grand cathedrals – are

[96] Bond, Adam L. *The Imposing Preacher*. Fortress Press, 2013.
[97] Bible, C. E. (2011). *Common English Bible*. Common English Bible.
[98] Jennings, Willie James. 2010. *The Christian Imagination*. Yale University Press.

necessary in the economy of God. Cities within Biblical witness are to be sites of God's goodness and divine activity at work.

The Biblical narrative is replete with images of the city. Christian scripture presents the city both as a place of deep brokenness, sin, and injustice (Jonah 1:2, Isaiah 13:19-22) and also a place of renewal and God's presence (Ezekiel 48:35). Beginning in a garden, the Biblical narrative ends in a city that becomes the dwelling place of God. Describing the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:3 (KJV) states, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." This stands in stark contrast to Babel, a city built to celebrate the ego, pride, and self-centeredness of humanity. The New Jerusalem becomes a symbol of the renewed city, a place where humans flourish under the reign of God. It is a city where nature and humanity, under the glory of the divine reign of God, coexists in mutual harmony. More importantly, the New Jerusalem becomes the place where God dwells. The Biblical city serves as the foundational model for the contemporary city. Through theological reflection, Black pastors can contend that the earthly city can become a site of divine encounter:A place where God dwells and humans flourish.

However, the life-giving capacity of cities has often been marred within Christian tradition, which has frequently exhibitedan anti-urban bias. In Genesis, the cities of Enoch, Babel, Sodom, and Gomorrah represent examples where human pride and self-sufficiency are constructed counter to the garden of Eden, where God's presence dwelt. Cities were often viewed as Babylon:wild, reckless, and needing to be abandoned. From the 1950s to the 2000s, the suburban captivity of the White Church emerged as white congregations fled urban centers selling their property, planting churches in the suburbs, and then sending missions teams to help

those in the “inner-city." The neo-urban church planting movements of the early 2000s focused merely on the flourishing of new upper-middle-class residents, replicating the revanchist policies of the secular elite. The call for the renewal of the cities was driven by theological imperialism, as white denominations re-discovered an interest in urban centers. For Black Christians, Black middle-class congregations also became sights of ghettoization, as the well-heeled and educated drove into urban centers and drove back home to the suburbs after worship. Black Christians must affirm with the Biblical narrative the goodness of the city. A theology of place helps Black Christians to understand a commitment to the flourishing of cities. Amos 9:14-15 (NRSVue) offers, “ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land,  and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them says the LORD your God.” Black pastors have a Biblical responsibility to declare hope along with the prophet Amos. The ruined city can be rebuilt, the city is not owned by the systems and power structures that uphold particular communities, but is the domain of the sovereign God.

Black Christians are called to the stewardship of place. Leviticus 25:23 states, “The land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.” Hence, Christians are not owners but stewards, strangers, and sojourners who are called to participate in the flourishing and well-being of the communities in which they inhabit. Christians, as José Humphries writes, must look at a neighborhood by asking what is God’s intent for physical places.[99] In Jeremiah 29:7 (NRSVue) God commands exiled Israel, “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Christians are exiles and sojourners, called to plant themselves within particular communities and to ensure the

[99]Gustine, Adam, and José Humphreys. 2023. *Ecosystems of Jubilee*. Zondervan.

welfare of those around them. To disregard the biblical and theological mandate of churches towards the flourishing of the cities in which they dwell is to render an ineffective witness of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Theology and Place

Gentrification,as stated in Chapter One, is a matter not only of local policies, but a result of globalization. The commodification of place through architecture, global brands, and the erasure of local institutions provides a challenge that must be addressed by communities of faith. Christian tradition, in addition to scripture, focuses on the global, articulating itself to being a universal faith. The Christian tradition is catholic in that it unites adherents in shared belief and practice. The catholicity of Christianity is a mystical tradition between a world that is seen, one that is unseen, and one that is yet to come. The catholicity of the Christian faith binds disparate and diverse humans into a shared global community across gender, sexual orientation, language, ethnicity, and cultures. Scripture also places significance on the local. The narrative of scripture, with its global themes of hope, loss, sorrow, joy, and faith, also takes place in particular moments, times, places, and peoples. The primacy of the local is seen in the incarnation of Jesus in John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."[100] That the divine took upon itself human flesh in a particular place, time, language, culture, and people, shows God's concern not only for the universal, but also the local. Scripture identifies Jesus *of Nazareth*. Jesus manifests himself from a particular community, region, people, language, food, and culture. God's concern for the local is not only witnessed in the incarnation, but also in the particularity

[100] Bible, C. E. (2011). *Common English Bible*. Common English Bible.

of how the incarnation occurred. God chose Brown Palestinian Jewish flesh amid Roman oppression. This particularity of the incarnation highlights God's concern for the poor and the oppressed, which is demonstrated throughout scripture. James Cone argues in *God of the Oppressed* that, "Jesus was not simply a nice fellow who happened to like the poor. Rather his actions have their origin in God's eternal being. They represent a new vision of divine freedom, climaxed with the cross and the resurrection, wherein God breaks into history for the liberation of slaves from societal oppression."[101] The emphasis of scripture upon the local is not only on individuals, but also on particular communities.

Jeremiah 29:7 articulates the importance of the local when it states, **"**promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare."[102] Thus, the cities in which Christians dwell matter. The languages, cultures, sounds, smells, architecture and public landscape of the city are places not only that Christians inhabit but places that God sends Christians to. Scripture and Christian tradition articulate a shared concern for the global and the local. Persons are called upon to seek the flourishing and well-being of all humanity through a mutuality that comes from being made in the image of the divine. Likewise, scripture and Christian tradition emphasize the local and the importance of peoplehood, personhood, and communities. Scripture's emphasis on the local bears witness, in particular, to God's concern for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. It must be ascertained that God is thus concerned about the universal and the particular, the global, and the local, the well-being of all humanity, but in particular the poor and the oppressed. God's concern for the global, as seen in John 3:16, is also manifested in the local. There is no concern for the abundant life promised to all humanity if it is not exhibited in certain times, places, people, and

[101] Cone, J. H. (2012). *God of the Oppressed:* Vol. Revised edition. Orbis.
[102] Bible, C. E. (2011). *Common English Bible*. Common English Bible.

communities. God is therefore concerned with certain people, neighborhoods, and communities, and desires their prosperity. Localized theology walks the streets of Los Angeles and enables pastors to listen to the rhythms of the neighborhood. Black pastors must attune themselves to the pulse of the street and ask what Jesus has to say to Leimert Park, Inglewood, View-Park, Windsor Hills, Compton, and Watts. Additionally, what does Jesus have to say to the Black residents of Culver City, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Pacific Palisades, and Downtown L.A.

Philosophical Frameworks

The forces of gentrification can seem overpowering in the face of those who are striving to maintain or reimagine their communities. Ephesians 6:12 states, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Christians are not to be naive of the world, the flesh, the devil. Jeremiah 29 is written to exiles displaced from their cities by an enemy who held them captive. The city particularly for Black communities has been sites of redlining, over-policing, food deserts, and political disenfranchisement. There are spiritual and social wars waged against the flourishing of persons. Cities can be and are sites of oppression and injustice, economic exploitation, and human degradation. Black Christians have a theological and social responsibility to declare the hope of God over and against life-destroying forces.

Black Christians must begin with a theology of human dignity and worth. In Genesis 1:26-27, God created humankind in God's image. Humanity bears divine sacredness and worth within its existence. To be human is to carry the image of God or the *Imago Dei.* The personhood of each human is grounded in dignity, worth, and value given by God. This formulation of value leads to the belief that God is therefore concerned with the well-being and prosperity of all

humanity. Samuel Dewitt Proctor articulated the role of preachers in declaring the "somebodiness" of humans: "Preachers make persons aware of the facile barriers produced by the distinctions that society creates. Proctor argued that the preacher also has a job to discern the burgeoning signs of community that appear. The sermon employs persuasion to convince people of the inherent equality and interdependency of all persons." The Black preacher proclaims the abundance of Jesus in a society based upon lack, injustice, and oppression. Jesus in John 10:10 states, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."[103] The Psalm writer declares in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."[104] If the cosmos or the world belongs to the divine, then God is concerned about the universal flourishing of the world and in particular the well-being of humanity.

Secondly, Black churches must draw on a Biblical and philosophical understanding of love. 1 John 4:20 states, "Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." The love of God for Christians must be shown in the tangible love of the neighbor. The Christian tradition exhorts individuals and communities to work for the welfare of the city as a means of achieving both individual and collective liberation. This liberation is an act of love. The love of Christians for the city is rooted in eschatological hope. As Dr. Adam Gustine writes, the gospel reveals that everything is always being set free in Christ.[105] Eschatological hope does not leave Christians waiting for the coming of Christ without addressing the needs of their neighbors. Instead, it provides the impetus for a renewed vision of

[103] Uk, C. (2008). *The Holy Bible*. HarperCollins.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Gustine, Adam, and José Humphreys. 2023. *Ecosystems of Jubilee*. Zondervan.

all of creation. Christians are called to seek the flourishing of cities because the earth is the realm of God and because God holds victory over death-dealing forces within God's hands.

Christians are not separate from the other inhabitants of cities but participants in commerce, education, arts, business, and entertainment. Through their witness of an eschatological hope; Christians do not remove themselves or disengage from the world as some traditions posit. Instead, they are called to be engaged participants in the body politic, participating in the all that leads to the flourishing of the communities in which they dwell. Isaiah 58:12 (NRSVue) states, "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." Christians are called to be renewers, rebuilders, and restorers of that which is destroyed, broken, and marred by sin. As Benjamin Tonna writes, "The biblical vision is not a consolation that helps one avoid the harsh reality of the present. It is not the opium of Christians. This vision is a sign, an *eschaton,* of what God will do- because he has decided to do it."[106] Hope in the Lordship of Jesus Christ gives Black Christians the ability to resist injustice. Articulating a Black reformed theology, Alan Boesak writes, "We are ready to face the costs of the suffering we know the enemy will inflict, because our courage is anchored in our faith in God and in our peace with God."[107] Black Christians motivated by what God has done and is doing are therefore called to seek the mutual well-being of all persons ensuring their dignity, worth, and value. Black Churches are animated by the gospel to be woven together with their communities. José Humphries writes, "Woven-ness animates our efforts to connect with our neighbors; we desire our neighbors to know we're present and can hopefully come to some form of connectedness with them in the common life"[108] As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. states "We are caught in an

[106] Tonna, Benjamin. 2004. *Gospel for the Cities*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
[107] Boesak, Allan Aubrey. 2014. *Dare We Speak of Hope?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
[108] Gustine, Adam, and José Humphreys. 2023. *Ecosystems of Jubilee*. Zondervan.

inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[109] This interdependence becomes the center of hope which Black preachers proclaim.

Black feminist love-politics provides an additional philosophical framework in which to engage the city and gentrification. Grounded in the question "Where is the love?," Black feminist love-politics reimagines a new public sphere grounded on feelings. As Jennifer C. Nash writes, "Black feminism's love-politics creates a public culture based on a collective "public feeling" of love…Love, then, is a practice of self, a labor of the self, that forms the basis of political communities rooted in a radical ethic of care."[110] Black feminist love-politics is, as Nash argues, a utopian, visionary, future-oriented community. \Black feminist thought, intertwined with the biblical witness, provides theological justifications for human flourishing that promote both spiritual renewal and material prosperity. Dr. Keri Day argues in *Unfinished Business: Black Women, The Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* that, "The Black Church should advance a more compassionate prosperity gospel that (1) affirms the life-transforming power of faith, and (2) locates affirmative faith within the contexts of many factors, including environment, economics, relationships, and opportunity." [111] Black churches, by affirming the goodness of creation, stewarding the places to which they have been called, nurturing and honoring human dignity, and embodying a love ethic, can become sites of what Jennifer Nash calls public redress. No longer merely becoming sites of woundedness, a community guided by love ethics becomes a place of liberation.

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[109] "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.'" n.d. Oberlin College and Conservatory. Accessed September 1, 2023. https://www2.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/BlackHistoryMonth/MLK/CommAddress.html.
[110] Nash, Jennifer C. 2013. *"Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality."* Meridians, no. 2 (March): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.11.2.1.
[111] Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2012).

In addition to the Biblical canon and its perspective on the city, the Christian theological tradition provides further perspective towards the responsibility of Black churches in addressing gentrification. African cosmologies and the Black prophetic Christian tradition, as witnessed in the United States, emphasize the interrelationship between the global and the local. Peter J. Paris in *The Spirituality of African Peoples* writes, "All African peoples agree that the tribal or ethnic community is the paramount social reality, apart from which humanity cannot exist. Similarly, all agree that the community is a sacred phenomenon created by the supreme God, protected by the divinities, and governed by the ancestral spirits. Thus, full participation in the community is a fundamental requirement of all humans."[112] African cosmology posits that the local, particularly the local community, is needed to flourish. Particular persons, people, and communities exist within the sacred realm or in the Christian tradition within a mystical union that unites persons across time and place. Utilizing African cosmologies, Cornel West argues, "The Black prophetic tradition claims that the life of a precious baby in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Haiti, Gaza, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Bogota, or anywhere else has the same value as a precious baby in the USA."[113] If God is concerned with the universal and the particular, and if, as African cosmologies suggest, humanity cannot exist without community, then the Black church needs a theological framework which posits that humans are called to seek the well-being of other persons because they share the divine imprint of being made in the *Imago Dei.* Furthermore, all people belong to the global community and should therefore have a place of belonging in the local community. The global concern for the well-being of one's fellow human being is then manifested in the local. People should be moved towards action if an image bearer of the divine suffers, experiences injustice, poverty, warfare, and is oppressed or found outside the community. This global concern for

[112] Paris, P. J. (1995). *The Spirituality of African Peoples* (p. 51). Augsburg Fortress Publishing.
[113] West, C., & Buschendorf, C. (2015). *Black Prophetic Fire* (p. 9). Beacon Press.

humanity must be exhibited locally. African cosmologies and the Black prophetic tradition articulate a call for justice, prosperity, and mutuality not only within the global community but also in the local.

Black Feminist love politics, African cosmologies, and the witness of Christian scripture, tradition, and experience form an Afro-Christian humanist theological hermeneutic. Afro-Christian humanism responds to gentrification that is grounded in the universalizing concept of the dignity and worth of human beings. This hermeneutic is concerned with the common good. Grounded in the Boston Personalist school of the Black Church tradition of Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr, William Stuart Nelson, and Samuel Dewitt Proctor, Afro-Christian humanism argues that "everybody is God's somebody." Ana Gutierrez, in her article *Building a New Humanism for a Globalised World: The Contribution of Religion* argues that a new humanism must ask how we live together in a worthwhile way.[114] Afro-Christian humanism is Christo-centric in that it is grounded in the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grounded in the reformed theological tradition emphasizing the lordship of Jesus Christ. Afro-Christian Humanism argues that the lordship of Jesus is the ground upon which liberation stands and from which the hegemonic forces that oppress African Americans are defeated. As Alan Boesak writes:

> We believe passionately with Abraham Kuyper that there is not a single square inch of life that does not fall under the lordship of Christ ... Here the Reformed tradition comes so close to the African idea of the wholeness of life that these two should combine to renew the thrust that was brought to Christian life by the followers of Calvin.[115]

Afro-Christian Humanism is also incarnational; the enfleshed and embodied life of the Lord Jesus Christ is a witness to God's concern for the material. It sees God in Brown Palestinian

[114] Vega Gutiérrez, A. (2021). *Building a New Humanism for a Globalised World: The Contribution of Religion. Ecclesiastical Law Journal, 23*(3), 294-321.
[115] Stout, Andrew C. *"Revolutionizing Theological Imagination Black Theology and the Reformed Tradition."* Journal of reformed theology 15, no. 1-2 (2021): 22–47.

Jewish flesh, it sees God in the local and argues that this God affirms the goodness of God's creation and has redeemed it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is Christian in that it participates in bearing witness to God's redemption of humanity through Jesus Christ. Afro-Christian humanism is humanist in that it argues that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus should lead to human flourishing. It asks the question of how the gospel of Jesus speaks to those whose backs are against the wall. It is humanist not in the sense of the classical definition of humanism in eschewing God or viewing the God question as irrelevant. Instead, it is humanist in the manner in which all Black thought is humanist. As Juan Floyd-Thomas writes, "Whether focused on sacred or secular principles and practices, the Black humanist tradition invariably has one penultimate goal: the redemption and liberation of Black people and thereby all humanity."[116]Afro-Christian humanism interrogates what leads to a sense of community, flourishing, and well-being for those God is most concerned with, and that is the disinherited and the marginalized. By asking how human beings, particularly Black persons flourish and live together as Gutierrez writes in a worthwhile way. If scripture calls us to seek the well-being of the city, then the Black churches through an Afro-Christian humanist framework must interrogate who is the city for, who is enabled to flourish in the city, and what systems and structures must be dismantled to ensure that all persons flourish in the city. As Neil Smith argues, gentrification seeks to "take back" or become a revanchist city for the middle class. Then a new prophetic imagination is needed for life in and for the city. Jesus, in John 10:10, claims he has come that humanity might have life and it more abundantly. Afro-Christian humanism argues that it is out of God's abundance that cities can become places of abundance where all persons can receive equitable homes, healthcare, access to public amenities, and commercial activity that

[116] Floyd-Thomas, J.. 2008. *The Origins of Black Humanism in America : Reverend Ethelred Brown and the Unitarian Church*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Accessed September 8, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

serves their needs. If cities can be reimagined to serve the needs of the middle class, they can also be re-imagined to serve the needs of all the populace. Afro-Christian humanism argues that spatial aesthetics, commercial development, and beautiful homes are not just the rights of the middle-class, but ofall people. As gentrification proceeds in Los Angeles and displaces Black residents, radical imagination is needed. An Afro-Christian humanist paradigm must ask what flourishing looks like for the Black residents of Los Angeles. It wrestles with how can the city of Los Angeles become a place where life is more abundant for all people regardless of economic status. Keri Day, in *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* writes, "The emerging Black Church is committed to strengthening its methods and strategies to secure thriving and abundance for all within its communities and society. Black churches can fashion concepts of prosperity that do not collude with America's current materialistic consumer culture."[117] Jeremiah 29:7 summons its readers to seek the welfare of the city. The Black church and pastor in L.A. through an Afro-Christian humanist paradigm seeks the welfare of the city, particularly for its most vulnerable. Through new concepts of prosperity and abundance, cities can become thriving social, political, and economic centers without the displacement of the most marginalized. The Black pastor as theologian articulates a theology of somebodiness, of love, of the goodness of creation, and the possibility of the city. The preached word leads to concrete action. Through challenging political structures, engaging corporate developers, creating community development corporations, and reimagining a theology of abundance, the Black church through an Afro-Christian humanist paradigm can forge cities in which abundance is possible for all people.

[117] Day, K. (2012). *Unfinished Business* (p. 117). Orbis Books.

# CHAPTER 5

# BLACK PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENTRIFICATION IN LOS ANGELES

## Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of gentrification on Black Churches in Los Angeles through interviews with Black Pastors of nine Black Churches in Los Angeles County. This chapter begins with exploring the background of the Black Church in Los Angeles. It then explores the dimensions of the study conducted. The limitations of this study are examined followed by the demographics of each congregation. The study then explores the impact of gentrification on these Churches. Additionally, perspectives on the role of the pastor in addressing gentrification are examined. The chapter then studies the changing nature of the Black Churches of Los Angeles due to gentrification. The chapter then interrogates ways in which Black Churches can be resourced into the future. The chapter concludes with ways in which new futures can be explored for Black Churches.

## The Black Churches of Los Angeles

The Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock, in *The Divided Mind of the Black Church,* articulates that "The Black Church was born for fighting for freedom."[118] The Black Church in Los Angeles is unique in that it was born as a place for a migrant Black community from the South, fleeing white supremacy, racial terrorism, and looking for opportunity on the golden shores of Los

[118] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*, Paperback, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity (New York London: New York University Press, 2020)., pg 13.

Angeles. Boosters marketed Los Angeles as a new “heaven” or “El Dorado,”" a place for Black persons to flourish. Unlike their siblings in New York and Philadelphia, the Black Churches of Los Angeles were not born out of a struggle for racial dignity, equity, and justice. Instead, Black Angelenos gathered to form congregations that would serve the needs of an emerging Black community. Until the 1880s, most Black congregations were struggling to stay open. Early congregations such as Second Baptist and First AME had barely more than 20 members until the migrations between the 1880s and 1920.Soon, these churches exploded in growth ,along with new congregations that emerged as Wesley Chapel Methodist Episcopal, St. Phillips Episcopal Church, Peoples Independent Church of Christ, Azusa Street Mission, and Westminster Presbyterian Church which served the needs of early Black migrants.

Later congregations such as West Angeles COGIC, Crenshaw Christian Center, Faithful Central Bible Church, Holman United Methodist Church, and the City of Refuge would emerge to serve the diverse Black community in L.A. Many of these congregations, including First AME would become megachurches known for vibrant worship, community development corporations, and charismatic pastors who served the needs of a bustling Black community. Other forms of Black religiosity would emerge, such as Black New Thought churches and some congregations such as Park Hills Community Church (Reformed Church in America) in View Park – while Windsor Hills would transition from predominantly white memberships to nearly entirely Black membership as neighborhood demographics transitioned. In the wake of the Rodney King riots in 1992, Black Churches such as First AME and West Angeles COGIC became vital forces in Black L.A., helping to provide calm and stability and working to redevelop their neighborhoods in collaboration with government agencies and cultural institutions and universities such as the University of Southern California.

Crisis Moments in Black L.A.

These churches provided cultural programming, social and political engagement, and spiritual uplift. As gentrification has displaced Black residents, the Black Churches of L.A. have experienced a crisis. With a lack of a centralized community from which to draw, congregant members drive either from further distances or have transferred membership to suburban congregations. Black Churches that led the L.A. community are also experiencing a moment of transition as senior leaders retire such as Cecil Chip Murray and his successor J. Edgar Boyd from First AME, Bishop Charles E. Blake from West Angeles COGIC, and Bishop Kenneth Ulmer from Faithful Central Bible Church. These transitions are also impacting small Black Churches or program-sized congregations that have also experienced pastoral transitions and are struggling to find new pastors. Lastly, a crisis of purpose regarding the identity of the church is found with aging congregations, shifting neighborhood demographics, and shrinking budgets.

In describing Black spiritual and social conditions, W.E.B. Dubois in *The Strivings Of The Negro People* ,describes a sense of inward struggle, a double consciousness in which the African and the Euro-American identity and heritage is at war within oneself.[119] The Black Church in Los Angeles embodies a Duboisian double-consciousness. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* write that "every Black person and every Black institution has participated in making compromises between the poles of accommodation and resistance."[120] Black Pastors in L.A. must respond to the twin poles of accommodation to the changing nature of the city and the new inhabitants that reside in their communities and resistance to the displacement of communities of color,

[119] W. E. B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” The Atlantic, August 1, 1897, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/strivings-of-the-negro-people/305446/.
[120] Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The Black Church in the African-American experience*. (Duke University Press)., pg 14.

particularly Black communities. Lincoln and Mamiya write, "In their accommodative role, Black churches have been one of the major cultural brokers of the norms, values, and expectations of white society."[121]

The Black churches of L.A. occupy a unique position as communities of faith. Dwelling between the poles of resistance and accommodation the Black churches in L.A. must wrestle with reimagining their purpose, mission, and existence, focusing upon the spiritual, social, economic, and psychological needs of the Black community. The question for the Black churches in L.A., particularly historic congregations with access to resources and power and yet civically and socially disenfranchised, is: will they resist gentrification? Or will they embrace the new residents and inhabitants of L.A., thereby transforming what it means to be Church, what it means to be a Black Church, along with the mission and purpose of these communities of faith?

Today, these historic congregations have faced significant challenges, including membership decline, pastoral turnover, and changing neighborhoods due to gentrification. These congregations compete for parking, and affordability as the cost of living rises, and a shrinking pool of persons from which to draw potential membership. As gentrification proceeds in Los Angeles and displaces Black residents, Black churches are faced with the challenges of limited resources, aging memberships, aging infrastructure, and changing neighborhoods. The Black church in L.A. is faced with the challenge of addressing gentrification and its continued relevance in the face of gentrification.

[121] Ibid.pg 15,

Dimensions of the Study on Black Pastors in L.A.

To understand the impact of gentrification on BlackcChurches, I conducted a series of interviews w with Black pastors from across Los Angeles. The analysis in this chapter is based on data from nine pastors of predominantly Black churches. These interviews were conducted during the summer of 2023 either in person at the researcher's office at the University of Southern California, *The Gathering Spot LA*, or via Zoom. Appendix C of this project contains the interview notes.These pastors belong to different ecclesial traditions, have varying lengths of tenure as pastors of their congregations, and serve different demographics. All participants were senior pastors of their respective churches. Eight of the pastors were men, and one was a woman. Pastors were invited to participate in thirty-minute interviews, with many of them becoming hour-long interviews. Pastors were identified through connections of the interviewer or local church websites. A broad range of Black ecclesial traditions was intentionally selected to provide a representative picture of the Black church in Los Angeles. The denominational affiliations include two Baptist Churches (American/National Baptist/Progressive National Baptist), United Methodist, Religious Science, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, United Church of Christ, and two Non-Denominational Churches (one is formerly Baptist, the other has connections to the Church of God in Christ). The congregations vary in size, with the majority being program-size churches of over 350 members. Three of the churches are small churches of 150 or fewe,r and one is a megachurch with several thousand members. The length of pastoral tenure also varies. Four pastors have served for over 15 years, with one pastor serving 36 years as Senior Pastor. Three have served less than a year, and two served between three and ten years.

The majority of the pastors were highly educated. Eight of the pastors held a master of divinity, and seven of the nine held a doctorate (Ed.D, DMin, PhD).

I focus my analysis in this chapter on how these pastors understand their congregations, the impact of gentrification on their communities and churches, the role of the pastor in addressing gentrification, and the potential future for Black Churches in Los Angeles. These pastors provide similar and diverging insights on the future of the Black Churches of Los Angeles.

## Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations to this project that affect the analysis of gentrification as a justice issue. First, this project is confinedto the study of Los Angeles. These interviews were limited only to churches located within the county of Los Angeles, seven of the churches are located in the city of Los Angeles. One church is located in Hawthorne, California, and the other is in Inglewood, California. This study takes into consideration the unique particularities of how gentrification manifests itself in Los Angeles. A study of gentrification and its impact may produce different results in other cities such as Washington D.C., New York, or Atlanta.

Secondly, this study is focused only on Black churches, and does not take into consideration the way gentrification affects other communities. This study also does not take into consideration multiracial/multiethnic congregations with significant Black memberships. Gentrification particularly in Los Angeles is having a significant impact on Hispanic/Latinx communities as well as Asian-American communities. However, the scale of this study is confined to the Black churches of Los Angeles in order to controlthe scope of this project, as well as highlight the importance of gentrification as a justice matter for Black churches at large.

An additional limitation of this study is its focus on the United States; it does not take into account the global nature of gentrification. Studies on gentrification in Sydney, London, and Paris were read and utilized to understand the global scale of gentrification. This study does not take into account how gentrification impacts churches within these contexts.

An additional limitation is that the research does not have a significant gender analysis. As noted, of the pastors interviewed, eight of the nine were men.The findings of this research, while generalizable, may not factor in the impact of gender due to the lack of representation of women within the sample of pastors interviewed.

Furthermore, the churches interviewed tend to hold prominence within Black Los Angeles and may not take into account the experiences of storefront, small, or independent churches not connected to traditional Black church networks or denominational systems. This study also did not take into consideration Non-Protestant Black Churches and is missing representation of how other Black Christians and non-Christian Black religious communities are impacted by gentrification.

## The Old Ship of Zion: The Demographics of Black Churches of Los Angeles.

Black Churches in Los Angeles were established during the first wave of migration between 1880 and 1920. Several of the churches interviewed were established during this period. Three of the congregations interviewed were over 100 years old. Established in 1885, the Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles is the oldest Black Church in L.A. Ward AME church was founded in 1902, and Trinity Baptist Church in 1917. Three of the congregations were established during the second wave of Black migration to L.A. Faithful Central Bible Church was founded in 1936, Holman United Methodist Church in 1945, Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship in the 1940s, and Guidance Church of Religious Science in 1967. Several

of the churches are more recent church plants, including New Journeys COGIC in 1992 and Word of Encouragement (WoE) Church in 2014.

The institutional form of the Black Church can be,like all institutions, diverse: socially, politically, denominationally, and economically. The Black churches of Los Angeles, like Black churches across the United States embody this diversity. Several of the Churches (Trinity Baptist, Word of Encouragement, Ward AME) described themselves as working-class or socio-economically diverse. Other congregations identified as having primarily professional or upper-middle-class congregations (Holman United Methodist and Faithful Central Bible Church). All of the churches have predominantly Black congregations. One congregation, the Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship, was founded as a multiracial (Japanese, White, and Black) church and has transitioned into a predominantly Black church. Faithful Central Bible Church listed increasing racial diversity among the pews.

Each congregation held varying theological beliefs, ranging from Pentecostal to New Thought. Of the nine churches interviewed, four are affiliated with predominantly white denominations (Religious Science, United Methodist, United Church of Christ, and American Baptist); four, including two of the prior churches, are also affiliated with historic Black denominations (National Baptist, Progressive National Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ); and two of the congregations are independent non-denominational churches. These congregations reflect the diversity of thought and practice within the Black churches. At the Guidance Church of Religious Science, the congregation is described as having Rev. Ike-style theology. Most of the parishioners are former Baptists who felt weighed down by the doctrine. They believe that God is within all things that are possible. The Word of Encouragement Church was established to step away from the traditionalism and dogma of the

AME Church. Their pastor describes them as a theologically sound congregation that focuses on bible study. It is a non-denominational, inclusive, and affirming congregation. Faithful Central was established as a Baptist congregation. Their pastor describes it as a Bible Church. Faithful Central, under the prior pastor, embraced the charismatic movement and shifted from Baptist to a more Charismatic worship style. That theological shift led the congregation to grow into a megachurch. Other congregations, such as Holman United Methodist and Ward AME, are traditional congregations. Holman's pastor described it as a liturgical, high-steeple, and formal congregation that is primarily upper-middle class and highly educated. Holman is a very traditional congregation with what the pastor describes as impressive elements of diversity and progressivism.

Many of the congregations listed themselves as *historic* and mentioned strong histories of charismatic pastors who grew their congregations. In an interview with the Senior Pastor of Second Baptist Church, he described Second Baptist as a historic congregation. Second Baptist is 138 years old and is the oldest Black Baptist congregation in Los Angeles. Second Baptist was established In 1885, 22 years after the Civil War. Dr. Epps in the interview spoke of the courage and ingenuity of the first Black settlers in Los Angeles. He states: what made them think they could come to a city of 12,000 when less than 10% of the population were Black? He argued that they had faith to believe they could accomplish much. During the Black Boom of L.A. from 1880-1920, Second Baptist was served by several pastors whom Dr. Epps listed as Rev. S.C. Pierce (1885-1887), Rev. C.H. Anderson (1887-1907), Rev. J.L. McCoy (1908-1915) Rev. H.D. Prowd (1915-1920).

Second Baptist would entire its nadir beginning in 1920 becoming a leading voice of the Black community in L.A. under the pastorates of Dr. Thomas L. Griffith, Dr. J. Raymond

Henderson, and Dr. Thomas Kilogre. The Griffith era from 1921-1940 helped establish Second Baptist in the Black social gospel tradition. Second Baptist constructed an award-winning sanctuary designed by noted Black architect Paul R. Williams, hosted the NAACP national convention, and became the leading Black Church in the city. Dr. Griffith, Dr. Henderson, and Dr. Kilgore led Second Baptist as an activist-congregation. Luminaries such as Ralph Bunche, Martin Luther King Jr., and countless others spoke from the pulpit of Second Baptist.

Trinity Baptist Church of Los Angeles is also over 100 years old. Trinity Church has been led by a succession of charismatic pastors particularly the Rev. Dr. J. Elliott Mason, a Fulbright fellow at the University of Edinburgh and a PhD in New Testament from the University of Southern California who served from the 1960s-1980s. Under Dr. Mason's leadership, Trinity emphasized spiritual renewal and social justice. Merging holiness theology with Black liberation theology he led Trinity to become a congregation of over 1,000 members. Faithful Central also listed the forty-year pastorate of Bishop Kenneth Ulmer as having a pivotal role in the life of their congregation. Leading this traditional Baptist congregation into a charismatic independent church, Bishop Ulmer's erudite spirit-filled preaching led Faithful Central to become one of the largest Churches in Los Angeles. The Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship mentioned Rev. Harold Kingsley as one of their leading former pastors, and Holman United Methodist Church is still influenced by the pastorates of the Rev. L.L. White and civil rights icon the Rev. James Lawson. These pastors shaped the identity, theology, and practice of their congregations, and are still revered by parishioners.

Gentrification and Black L.A.

Gentrification as explored in this project is a threat to the well-being and future of the Black Community in Los Angeles. The National Community Reinvestment Coalition found Los Angeles to be one of the most intensely gentrified cities in the United States.[122] The Black pastors interviewed in this project found gentrification to be a particular challenge to the well-being and future of their communities and congregations. The Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church shared that in his working-class congregation, many parishioners moved away when the factory jobs closed. Due to gentrification, their membership has declined. At one point Trinity had 1,000 members; "now those numbers have dwindled because African Americans are leaving. A million African Americans have left since 1996 when he arrived." He also finds that in L.A., the transition in his neighborhood has been from Black to Hispanic to White. " It's been hard trying to reach the Hispanic community because of the language barrier and the style of worship. There are also great Hispanic pastors and churches in the community. Commenting on the neighborhood transitions he states:

> The neighborhood has gone from majority African American to mostly Hispanic. In the last 5 years, there are more white residents. Three white businesses have opened across the street. A coffee shop that he frequents has a mainly white clientele. Twenty-seven years ago you would never see white people in the neighborhood. Some white visitors have come to the Church but they haven't joined. There are three white members but they are married to Black Women.

The transitions in neighborhoods have also left congregations scrambling to address not only the spiritual needs of parishioners but also their physical needs. The pastor of Holman United Methodist Church asked, "How do people find affordable housing?" He has witnessed the

[122] Richardson, Mitchell, and Edlebi, "Gentrification and Disinvestment 2020."

community change. The surrounding community has changed with primarily non-black residents and non-black people purchasing homes. The changes also bring a sense of grief for his parishioners. In his interview, he states they are grieving what used to be or what was and grieving the departure of what the community used to be. Traditional congregations like Holman are also left wondering how they can address the spiritual needs not only of their new neighbors

> With gentrification we have the start and presence of non-traditional churches that cater to a multicultural congregation with cutting technology, nontraditional, and not steeped in black church tradition but enticing to a younger black generation. More choices of worship for children and grandchildren are more appealing.

Like Holman and Trinity, the Pastor of Second Baptist views gentrification as a challenge to historic Black congregations. The neighborhood demographic has changed drastically. When the building was established in 1926 it was a Black community and people walked to church. Then people moved west to Baldwin Hills, Ladera Heights. The neighborhood now is 90% Hispanic. In an attempt to address the needs of their changing neighborhood, they attempted a Spanish congregation with the ABCUSA with Dr. Enrique Torres, but it did not succeed. They have lent the Church to Hispanic congregations for week-long meetings. Like many of the congregations surveyed, they own their property and also own property in the community. Second Baptist is a landlord in the community, but wonders how the Church can show the Hispanic residents they care about them. Today, Second Baptist is an older congregation, unlike its heyday in the 1920s-1980s. Dr. Epps states that it is a congregation that has to remake itself. Second Baptist, he argued, has to rebrand itself as a viable congregation that can meet the needs of 21st-century humanity. He stated that the church must address the political, spiritual, physical, and human motivations of people in the community. To remain viable it must ask “What does that abundant

life look like?" Everything we do brings about destruction and decay but God in Christ shows us how to have abundant life. The church, he argues, must then be a source of addressing and providing for that abundant life found in scripture.

The age of a congregation or the theology of the church does not impact the effects of gentrification on Black Churches in Los Angeles. The Guidance Church of Religious Science was established in 1967. However, it is an older and aging congregation of folks primarily in their 60s-80s. Their pastor, a former Baptist minister, argues that there are many factors to decline. There are geographic dispersion factors, economic factors, and the relocation of people. The fate of the life of the Church is within the Church. Younger generations, he states, aren't in the game. The 40-year-old who owns their home, has an education, and doesn't sit in the pews. He believes young adults want a word, they want wisdom. People in their 30s-40s are dealing with the effects of gentrification, inflation, and white supremacy and don't want to go to Grandma's Church. Likewise, Faithful Central Bible Church, a megachurch with a multigenerational congregation, has also seen a shift in its community. In an interview, their pastor stated that more white and Asian families are moving into Inglewood, sparked by the So-Fi stadium being built, and new luxury apartments and gated communities that have been added to the housing stock; these factors are changing the cost of living for the community. So the gated communities with homes starting at $1 million to $1.2 million impact buyers who used to be able to afford Inglewood. The rising market is increasingly making it difficult to purchase a home. People who couldn't buy in Beverly Hills are now moving into Inglewood. The Intuit dome is also causing gentrification alongside So-Fi stadium. The cost of living in the city of Los Angeles is also driving people to Inglewood.

Two of the congregations stated that while their neighborhoods are changing, it hasn't changed the church's demographics because they have always been commuter congregations. The pastor of the Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship stated that they are a struggling congregation. It is a primarily older congregation trying to find a new sense of identity. CCCF has historically been a commuter church. The demographic shifts in the neighborhood have not impacted the membership. In the past the pastor stated that the neighbors have not liked the congregation. The neighborhood is Sugar Hill, which used to be an affluent Black neighborhood. It is now young progressive white families that are coming into the neighborhood. Ward AME Church is also primarily a commuter congregation. The neighborhood they are located in is a Hispanic community and there hasn't been a lot of evidence of that changing. There is a big student population due to USC being a few blocks away. The church rents out houses to USC students as a source of income. The community remains predominantly Hispanic and Black. The Church isn't a community church anymore. People live in Carson, Pasadena, Inland Empire, and Long Beach. Their pastor argues people go to worship spaces they want and not in the community they live in anymore, so people are willing to commute to congregations they enjoy.

## The Pastor's Role in Addressing Gentrification

Dr. Adam L. Bond describes the life and ministry of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor:

> Proctor wanted to produce public theologians, black publican theologians specifically, who would discern the ills of the

> American environment and proclaim a truth that would resolve the problems in the Black community and in the world.[123]

Scholars such as Lawrence and Mamiya, Kenyatta Gilbert, Raphael Warnock, and Keri Day have argued for the prophetic and priestly nature of the Black Churches. Particularly, Black scholars such as Dubois, E. Franklin Frazier, and Benjamin Mays have highlighted the influential role that Black pastors have in shaping their congregations. In regards to gentrification as a justice issue in the Black community, the Black pastor has a central role to play in shaping the consciousness of their congregations. Each of the pastors interviewed highlighted the importance of the pastor in addressing the impact of gentrification in their communities. Some Pastors believed for example that the pulpit and preaching is a place for the conscientization of their congregations regarding gentrification. Rev. Tunstill, the pastor of Trinity Baptist Church stated, "Preaching makes all the difference. We have to talk about economic justice, we have to talk about economic self-determination. We need to take that on ourselves." Highlighting his mentor the Rev. J.H. Jackson, former president of the National Baptist Convention, Rev. Tunstill emphasized that we need to move from protest to production and own our businesses and banks. "We've lost more land than we've ever owned since the 1920s. We need to own our land, produce business, we need to also include other racial groups in our work around economic justice." Dr. Walden, Senior Pastor of Holman United Methodist Church also highlighted the role of preaching on matters such as gentrification. In his interview, he states:

> Economics is one of the top ten topics the Bible speaks about from Genesis to Revelation. How you spend, loan, and give money. Money comes up a lot, Jesus talks about it. We live in a spiritual world, relational world, and economic world. Money doesn't solve all problems but it can solve them. Money and financial literacy should be taught. A lot of communities of color are financially

[123] Bond, Adam L. *The Imposing Preacher: Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Black Public Faith*. Lanham: Fortress Press, 2013.

> illiterate. That's why they have been preyed upon by financial institutions and white people.

Gentrification as an economic issue was a key theme in all of the interviews. All of the pastors addressed the role in which economic practices both past and present impact Black communities. Many believed in addressing economic issues from the pulpit. Dr. J-P Foster, Senior Pastor of Faithful Central stated, "From the pulpit, you need to say the community is changing, don't sell grandma's house, don't make emotional decisions." He argued that an aspect of economic injustice is when people are not informed. He believes the pulpit must inform the congregation. A number of the pastors addressed creating ministries or programs that could curtail the impacts of gentrification in the Black community. Dr. Najuma Smith, Founder and Senior Pastor of Word of Encouragement Church, believes that the Church has to reclaim its role in the community to combat gentrification. She argued that the church has to be rebuilt as the center of the community. The church, she believes, must move from a place of performative success and prosperity into a family and community.

Dr. J-P Foster, Senior Pastor of Faithful Central Bible Church, spoke of the importance of creating ministries that address economic issues. Gentrification, he stated, impacts minority communities. Some people prey on communities of color. He believes it's important to explain the process of economics and what are the impacts of gentrification on a community. The community around the church is changing and from the pulpit, they have articulated to church members to not sell their house. They offered workshops on the process of gentrification, how to think about economics, and how to think about developing or selling their home. Or how can you keep your house and rent your home? Encouraging homeownership; you have a portfolio and

long-term legacy and trust for your family. Not just focused on a pot of money now but passing on generational wealth. At Faithful Central, they have a team that focuses on economic injustice. They believe it is important to educate your congregation. Each of the pastors believed gentrification is a problem but each congregation had a different idea on how to address it or what is needed. Holman United Methodist and Trinity Baptist Church have job training programs for young people. Dr. Walden of Holman United Methodist Church also suggested that churches should consider a community development corporation where they partner with the county and the city for different grants and programs targeted toward young people. All of the Churches strucka common theme on the importance of educating congregations on economic issues/financial resources. Whether that was through financial literacy programs, community development corporations, or preaching on gentrification as an economic and spiritual issue.

## The Changing Nature of the Black Church

The Black church in the post-civil rights era no longer serves the same role as the center of the Black community. In particular, with neighborhood demographics changing, Black churches no longer have immediate communities from which to draw members who help sustain these congregations. Each pastor interviewed believed that their congregations had unique challenges in addressing the changing needs of their neighborhoods. Rev. Tunstil of Trinity believed that rebuilding their Sunday School and becoming a more LGBTQIA-affirming congregation would help stem the tide of membership loss and draw new members to the congregation. However, a strength of Trinity is that they own not only their building but surrounding properties from which they generate income. Ward AME church likewise owns homes from which it generates income to sustain the congregation. For Ward, they believed that

building a strong social media presence and digital engagement would help them grow their congregations and draw new members to their community. They have also partnered with community organizations such as the Crenshaw YMCA. Dr. Walden of Holman also stressed the importance of land ownership. Holman owns a duplex, a parsonage, and a campus of several buildings. They also generate income from renting their parking lot for film crews. To secure their future, Dr. Walden believes that churches like Holman need to be clear on their identity and use that as a strength. A point of pride for Holman is that for many Black people, if they are in urban areas, they inherited white churches from white flight, which allowed Black churches to movein and maintain the building. Holman built every building on their campus, their sanctuary, education, and office building. Holman prides itself in being self-sustaining, in partnerships with local communities that bring in local forms of income. Holman also has a long history of having Asian and White Ministers serve under the leadership of Black pastors.  For Second Baptist, Dr. Epps believes their future is investing in digital media and reimagining their congregation. He believes that the Black hurch is an institution that is needed for the thriving of the Black community. Black churches he argues need to survive and he thinks the future is bright. It may be smaller, but it may exert a large influence despite its size and will be more involved politically, socially, politically, and culturally. It will be a hybrid form of community (digital-in-person). He believes that the church can expand in ways that are new and not imagined before. Dr. Pickens of Guidance Church of Religious Science believes that the future is in removing the wall between sacred and secular. Pastors are blaming the city council for fixing the Church. He states, “You know the way?  Jesus says you know the way.”  For Dr. Pickens' meditation, Buddhism, the insights of Iyanla Vazant, tapping, and chakras provide insights into our faith. He thinks we are missing inner wisdom and knowledge. He believes that to address

gentrification. The pastor has to lead. He states, “It’s about leadership. The pastor’s role is to lead.” The pastor is the Spiritual Director and Senior Minister. At Guidance, the main role of the Pastor is teaching. Discipleship is learning. Jesus says I don’t call you disciples, I call you friends. He believes we need to learn from one another including “non-religious sources.” and engage the world around us. The Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship was founded as a multiracial congregation. For Pastor McKnight, the question is how do you revive a struggling congregation? He believes that the future is the recovery of the Kingdom perspective and lens of inclusivity: “Whoever is there you are trying to get them as Jesus as lord. Whoever is in the neighborhood, that's who you are called to serve.” Rev. Mcknight is interested in creating a space where worship is not so culturally specific that people can get it. Dr. Najuma Smith of Word of Encouragement holds roots both at Second Baptist and First AME, the oldest congregations in Black Los Angeles. However, her young, predominantly women-led congregation believes the future is in a practical, applicable Christianity. She states, “People want to see their Christianity lived out, serving, giving, and doing things for others. Does it make sense for my day-to-day life? I need to apply what you are preaching to my day-to-day life. It has to be practical, it just can’t be churchy. The sermons people hold onto are the sermons that hold onto their real lives.” Likewise, Bishop Richarson of New Journeys COGIC established his congregation in response to the needs of the Black community following the 1992 riots. He believed that churches should be responsive to the needs of the Black community.  Dr. Foster of Faithful Central believes that the Church has a strong future in responding to the crisis of gentrification. He believes that reimagining ministry doesn’t have to happen. Instead, if the church just focuses on teaching the Bible, it will grow. White families, Asian families, and Hispanic families are now coming to Faithful Central. For him, he focuses on how the depth of the Bible is taught and it's not a

hollering or screaming sermon. He believes in both exegeting the text and context. For instance, he uses examples that are inclusive in preaching to reach a broad congregation. Examples aren't based on race unless preaching explicitly on issues of race and matters of race. He believes the church, like Rev. McKight ,must focus on whoever their immediate neighbors are. "Whatever the community looks like, that is who we are trying to help. It is 60% Hispanic in Inglewood." They have a Counseling Center and have developed mental health resources staffed by Loyola Marymount University and Pepperdine University students. Faithful Central also focuses on creating a sense of intentional welcome, training staff and volunteers to greet and welcome diverse newcomers and make them feel comfortable. He states they don't stop being black but want to help people feel welcome in general. He believes they should have staff and volunteers trained with a level of excellence.

Resourcing the Future

Gentrification for many of the pastors was one of the main challenges facing their local congregation. Gentrification produces a host of problems for Black churches that include not only the displacement of congregants but a loss of potential new members, decreased resources, and dealing with new neighbors who may not understand the importance of Black institutions like the church. Each of the pastors addressed how they could be resourced and supported to effectively address gentrification. Dr. JP Foster of Faithful Central highlighted that to effectively address gentrification there has to be collaboration between the pulpit and the pew. He recommended that churches ask professionals who can supply the resources to help create programs. He stated, "Reach out to congregants who are politically savvy, business savvy who can help educate congregations on these issues." Dr. Foster also suggested creating town halls at local churches with civic officials to talk about gentrification and changes in the neighborhood.

Civic officials can help you educate congregations. He also recommended that churches partner with one another. “Pastors have to work together. The Kingdom works together. Pastors should be aiding each other. Reach out to other churches that have various resources.” Dr. Najuma Smith also spoke to the changing nature of the Black church in Los Angeles. With the retirement of Bishop Blake of West Angeles, Cecil Murray of First AME, Bishop Ulmer of Faithful Central, and the passing of Apostle K.C. Price of the Faithdome, churches need assistance in leadership transitions. These pastoral successions affect those who will cast a vision for the future of not only their congregations but the community at large. She also suggested that churches partner with corporate entities as well as apply for grants that can help with community development. Rev. Mcknight also suggested that churches should engage in applying for grants to further strengthen their ministries and community outreach programs. Dr. Walden of Holman United Methodist also suggested that partnering with hospitals, universities, and other local institutions is vital to address the varied needs of Black communities. Lastly, many of the pastors felt that webinars or a resource was needed to help pastors think through gentrification and how to develop innovative ministries that can help black churches thrive into the future.

# CHAPTER 6

# BLACK FUTURES AND THE BLACK CHURCH

The Black Church in Los Angeles faces a moment of transition. Gentrification has caused Black communities to be displaced and many Black churches are not only experiencing the loss of younger members but long-standing parishioners who can no longer afford to live in the neighborhood. The Black pastors surveyed believe that gentrification is one of the most pressing issues facing Black people in Los Angeles. This issue affects the Black Churches regardless of education, denominational affiliation, and pastoral tenure. While gentrification is a challenge, all of these pastors have hope for a vital and vibrant future for the Black churches in Los Angeles.

## Black Futures & Black Cities

The prophet Isaiah, writing to a captive Israel in Babylon, proclaims a word of hope from God. Their future is not one of exile nor of the hopelessness in experiencing the downfall and destruction of Jerusalem. Isaiah reminds them that, as a people, God has hope and a future for them. Isaiah 61:4 states, "They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations."(ESV) The future for Israel was the restoration of ruined cities, a place of flourishing, well-being, and thriving. Isaiah's prophetic imagination cultivated hope for a hopeless people. Isaiah's imagination was not based upon the present circumstances and context of captive Israel, but provided an alternative vision for the future.

As gentrification displaces Black residents of Los Angeles, pricing persons out of their homes, erodes Black communities, increases the economic challenges of Black persons, and challenges the futures of Black churches, a vision of hope is needed to imagine a future for Black people in Los Angeles. The noted Black American poet Langston Hughes writes in his poem, *Dreams*:

> Hold fast to dreams
> For if dreams die
> Life is a broken-winged bird
> That cannot fly.[124]

To respond to gentrification, the dream-bearing capacity of the Black Churches in Los Angeles must be recovered. Like the prophet Isaiah, an imagination must be cultivated that is not predicated upon the present circumstances of displacement nor bound by the limitations of white supremacy. Afrofuturism provides insights that Black Churches can draw upon as they reimagine the future of their communities, churches, and Black persons.

## Prophetic Vision/Afro Futures: Black in Los Angeles

Roger A. Sneed writes in *The Dreamer and the Dream: Afrofuturism and Black Religious Thought, "*the promise of Afrofuturism is its re-visioning of Black lives, and giving Black futurists a power denied them by white supremacy."[125] Black people have a future in Los Angeles. As the Afro-Spaniards first imagined a new city, Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles Del Río de Porciúncula, which emerged from the deserts of Southern California,[126] their spiritual descendants in Black Los Angeles can imagine a hopeful future for themselves. Los Angeles has held mythic qualities for Black persons. Marketed as "El Dorado" or the Black "Mecca," Los Angeles has been viewed as a place of opportunity and reinvention for Black

[124] Hughes, Langston, Arnold. Rampersad, and David. Roessel. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf, 1994.
[125] Sneed, Roger A. *The Dreamer and the Dream*. Ohio State University Press, 2021.
[126] Hunt, Darnell M., and Ana-Christina. Ramón. *Black Los Angeles American Dreams and Racial Realities*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

persons. Yet, there is a dark underside. The Watts Riots of 1965 and the Rodney King Riots of 1992 have challenged the notions of Los Angeles as a place of opportunity for Black persons. The displacement of Black persons due to gentrification further complicates this narrative.

Yet, the role of prophetic imagination is to see beyond the challenges that persons find themselves in. Afrofuturistic eschatological hope is grounded in the descent of a heavenly city. Black Christians in Los Angeles pray the "Lord's Prayer;" the incantation of ,"Thy Kingdom Come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is a summons to resistance to the injustices of gentrification. Contained within the faith of Black Christians is the possibility that the City of Angels can tangibly represent God's reign, God's will, and God's world. It is a resurrection hope that is not bound by death-dealing forces. A Black future in Los Angeles is grounded in an AfroFuturistic vision in which Black persons not only survive but thrive in Los Angeles. It has been the tradition of the Black Church to speak with prophetic hope and engage in prophetic praxis to craft new futures in which Black persons thrive. The future of Black Los Angeles is grounded in the recovery of the prophetic capabilities of the Black Church to proclaim a good future.

## Facing the Rising Sun

The prophetic capabilities of the Black Churches in Los Angeles means that the city of Los Angeles can be reimagined to serve the needs of not only the middle class, but of all persons. Adapting an AfroChristian humanist hermeneutic, Black pastors in Los Angeles, through sermons, op-eds, protests, and collaborations with local businesses in View Park, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, Jefferson Park, and Downtown, can fight for a city that is equitable for all people. Like the Biblical prophets or like Black Social Gospel preachers the Black Churches of Los Angeles must recover their prophetic voice. Standing in the tradition of Reverdy Ransom,

Henry H. Proctor, J. Raymond Henderson, Dr. Cecil Murray, and Dr. Thomas Kilgore, the Black churches of Los Angeles must be conscious of the city.

As the pastors surveyed in this project mentioned, the prophetic capabilities of the Black Church reside in the pulpit, in financial literacy workshops, in town hall forums with civic officials, in partnerships with universities such as USC and UCLA, and in advocacy organizations such as LA Voice and CLUE (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice). Black churches have already been a pivotal force in passing California Senate Bill 4 allowing churches to build affordable housing on their land.[127] Black business owners in Leimert Park have already organized to retain Black ownership of Black property and businesses. Black churches need to partner with these organizations to be a voice for the future of Black Los Angeles[128] Churches can work with these groups to empower their congregations on how to build homeownership, how to start a business, and encourage members to retain their homes and not sell them to developers.

Black churches in Los Angeles should also adopt what Keri Day identifies as a compassionate prosperity gospel. This prosperity gospel is not grounded in capitalistic, materialistic, Western notions of individualism, but in the idea of Ujaama (cooperative economics). Ujaama for the Black churches of Los Angeles means re-exploring the use of church property. Many of the congregations surveyed own not only their buildings but houses and property around the Church. Black churches should partner with organizations such as LA Voice or property developers to

[127] Wagner, David. "Homes In God's Backyard: California Lawmakers Pass Bill For Housing On Church Land | LAist." LAist, September 12, 2023. https://laist.com/news/housing-homelessness/sb-4-california-bill-housing-religious-land-higher-education-property-wiener-los-angeles.

[128] Smith, Erika D. "How to Win the Fight against Gentrification in Leimert Park - Los Angeles Times." Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, June 27, 2023. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-06-27/leimert-park-gentrification-land-trust-black-cultural-destination.

build affordable housing. Reimagining sacred space could help turn Black Church properties into a new form of Institutional Churches where living space, commercial space rented out by black-owned businesses, and even educational institutions/ worship space can be combined to form a new form of community. Such projects have been undertaken in cities like Washington D.C. at Emory Fellowship United Methodist Church, which developed ninety-nine affordable housing units around their historic sanctuary.[129] Additionally the Christian Cultural Center, a predominantly Black Church in New York City has submitted plans to develop an "urban village" of affordable housing on church-owned property.[130]

In response to the challenges facing the Black community at the turn of the twentieth century, churches such as Second Baptist of Los Angeles, First Congregational of Atlanta, and the Institutional AME Church of Chicago built churches to serve the pressing needs of the community. Once again, Black Churches need to reimagine the use of their space and property to create vibrant ecosystems for Black persons. These partnerships could build properties that are aesthetically pleasing, economically beneficial, and allow for the flourishing of all people. Not only will persons in the community have access to banks, coffee shops, daycares, bookstores, and aesthetically pleasing gardens, parks, and apartments, But Black churches can also develop an income that enables them to continue to do ministry and not solely depend on tithes and offerings to sustain them.

[129] "A Ward 4 Church Made It Possible to Build 99 New Units of Affordable Housing," Street Sense Media, accessed January 24, 2024, https://streetsensemedia.org/article/ward-4-church-made-possible-99-new-affordable-housing-units/.
[130] Ben Brachfeld, "Pastor's Proposed 'Urban Village' With Affordable Housing in East New York Begins Public Review," Brownstoner, June 15, 2022, https://www.brownstoner.com/development/east-new-york-affordable-housing-christian-cultural-center-12020-flatlands-avenue-ulurp/.

Black churches may also need to reinvent themselves in the face of gentrification. A multiethnic future is possible for Black churches, and as neighborhoods gentrify ,Black churches will need to explore how to be rooted in Black culture while creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for other communities. The Negro Spiritual, "Plenty Good Room," encourages Black churches to envision how they may open up their doors to new constituents rather than resign themselves to either closing their doors or moving. While much has been written on predominantly white churches becoming multiethnic, there has been little written on how Black churches can become multiethnic. However, there is a strong history of Black pastors such as Howard Thurman, who pastored the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in 1940s San Francisco, who have led multiethnic congregations.

There is also a vital future possible for Black churches that attract younger Black families and young adults who have left the church. Churches such as Word of Encouragement and Faithful Central draw diverse demographics while ministering to a younger population. These churches engage in the use of digital media, charismatic worship, and approachable forms of teaching which draw younger demographics into their pews.

Churches will also need to become collaborative, partnering across denominational, class, and other boundaries to resist gentrification together. They may form Community Development Corporations that can allow a collective voice at the table when dealing with government and corporate entities. These partnerships can also lead to churches applying for grants, partnerships with larger corporations, and developing projects that service the needs of the entire community. Black churches will need to see themselves as part of a larger whole and not as separate entities. Black churches may also need to consider mergers or forming a collegiate church system in which they share resources, pastors, staff, or resources while operating as separate campuses of

one church. A multi-site model of Black churches may effectively resource and serve the needs of Black communities in Los Angeles.

Denominations also have a responsibility towards addressing gentrification and its impact on Black churches. Many mainline denominations have sold Black church buildings in urban communities after membership declined. That money is then reinvested into the denomination and not into Black communities. Mainline denominations (The Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), American Baptist Churches USA, United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church) have a responsibility to invest in church planting in Black urban communities, reinvesting any profits from selling Black church buildings back into Black communities, businesses, educational institutions, or churches. These institutions have profited off Black persons and Black bodies and need to invest in creating futures for Black persons. Black persons must pressure their denominations to invest in resourcing and to commit to reimagining how Black churches can be revitalized through financial, spiritual, and educational materials. Black Denominations such as the National Baptists, Church of God in Christ, AME, AME Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal Church also have a responsibility to emphasize developing vibrant futures for Black persons. The Church of God in Christ ,for example, has built affordable housing in Memphis, Tennessee and the First AME Church of Los Angeles and West Angeles COGIC have community development corporations.

## Future Research

The research presented here is just the beginning of exploring the depths of how gentrification impacts Black communities. The surveys in this project can be expanded into a larger project. If more than nine pastors were surveyed, the findings could get a broader picture of how gentrification is a social justice crisis in Black communities. This larger project could explore not just Los Angeles County, but other metropolitan areas such as Oakland, California, Detroit, Michigan, Atlanta, Georgia, Washington D.C., and other major cities. Gentrification is also affecting small to medium-sized cities such as Memphis, Tennessee, Rochester, New York, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and research into these communities would add to these findings.

The research developed here could also be adapted into workshops on gentrification and its impact on Black churches in Los Angeles, or a webinar could be developed to present these findings to the community. This project hopes to resource Black churches to recover a hopeful and prophetic future of thriving and flourishing for Black persons. Additionally, this research can be used to create a community based dialogic process that creates/re-establishes community bonds, builds collective empowerment, and results in structural change. Partnerships between the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, LA VOICE, the Mayor's Office, the USC Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and local churches can help establish these community dialogues.

Future research is also needed on how Black churches can become multiethnic communities of faith. Traditionally, resources on becoming multicultural churches focus on how white churches

diversify their memberships. Additional research is needed for how Black churches can draw Latinx, White, and Asian constituencies to the worship and traditions of Black churches.

Finally, future research needs to engage a diverse sample of pastors and communities. For example, this study was entirely LA-based, US-based, Christian, and Black. While there is diversity in the population sampled, a more diverse study could expand how the church addresses gentrification more broadly.

# APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal

# A City Which Hath Foundations
## The Response of African-American Churches to Gentrification in Los Angeles, California.

By
Brandon C. Harris

New York Theological Seminary
March 1, 2023

Challenge Statement:

Historic African-American neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California, are facing the challenges of gentrification. The rapid shift in neighborhood demographics exacerbates the intersectional injustices of housing inequality, racism, and poverty. As cities are shaped by gentrification and lose African-American residents, African-American persons are separated from the spiritual institutions that provide spiritual, social, and cultural uplift. African-American churches thereby lose stakeholders in their congregations and the larger community. This project will examine African-American Churches in Los Angeles and the role of the African American pastor in responding to gentrification.

Chapter 1

## Introduction to the Setting

The City of Angels, El Dorado, La La Land. Los Angeles, California, is a city of many contradictions. Built on the edge of the Pacific Ocean and surrounded by Mountains, Los Angeles was originally settled by the Tongva and Chumash. Afro-Spaniards established the city of Los Angeles in 1781. A multicultural and multiethnic city of cities, Los Angeles is a global crossroads. It has also been a place of personal reinvention, cultural innovation, and religious pluralism. Marketed as Eden or for many African American migrants as El Dorado. Los Angeles has long represented the promises of economic prosperity, self-fulfillment, and abundance. Early Black migrants in the 1920s and 1930s moved as boosters sold the promises of the beautiful L.A. climate, lessened racial tension, and economic opportunity. L.A. represented a promised land for Black migrants from Louisiana, Texas, and across the American South who faced severe racialized terror post-reconstruction. It is also a city with a complicated racial history, including racial covenants, sundown towns such as Culver City, the Watts riots of 1965, and the Rodney King riots of 1992. Recent tensions continue as recently as the fall of 2022, with racist comments regarding the influence of the Black community in L.A. by Latinx members of the Los Angeles City Council.

The growth of modern Black L.A. began during the late nineteenth century when significant Black migration occurred as racial violence increased following the end of reconstruction. Boosters, Black newspapers, and Black citizens of L.A. characterized as "God's Country, Eden, and El-Dorado"[131] Los Angeles has a long and storied history of a vibrant African-American middle and upper-middle-class alongside immense poverty. L.A. has a small

[131] Flamming, *Bound for Freedom Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*.

Black population only composing 8% of the city.[132] The African American community has an outsized political, cultural, and social influence relative to its small population. Ranging from the long and successful mayoralty of Tom Bradley to the recent election of Karen Bass in 2022. The influence of the music industry and Black musicians from rap, jazz, gospel, R&B, and soul, to the influence of Black Hollywood actors and musicians. Black Los Angeles is an amalgamation of Western individualism and Southern tradition.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Central Avenue and South Los Angeles would become home to robust black communities with a vibrant music scene, large churches, and social organizations. The mass migration that occurred during World War II would expand L.A.'s Black population and the 1965 Watts riots would shape L.A. with $40 million in damages, 4,000 arrests, and 34 deaths. [133] During the 1950s and 1960s, the Black middle class slowly moved into neighborhoods such as Wellington Square, Lafayette Square, Ladera Heights, Windsor Hills, View Park, and Leimert Park with their stately homes that would become known as the Black "Beverly Hills." The Black middle class also expanded into the suburbs surrounding L.A. By 1970, 12% of the Black population in Los Angeles County lived in the suburbs. [134] Though the Black population has always been smaller in contrast to the Black populations of other cities by 1973, the city elected its first Black Mayor, Tom Bradley. [135] The gentrification of Black L.A. would begin in the 1980s with the rise of the Latinx population in South Central. By the 2000s, the Latinx population outnumbered Black residents (58%) to (40%). [136]

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[132] "Impacting Black History."
[133] Stanford University, Stanford, and California 94305, "Watts Rebellion (Los Angeles)," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, June 12, 2017, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/watts-rebellion-los-angeles.
[134] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*.
[135] Fritsch, "Tom Bradley, Mayor in Era Of Los Angeles Growth, Dies."
[136] "The History of South Central Los Angeles and Its Struggle with Gentrification."

The Black community in L.A. finds itself in a crisis moment. Los Angeles is rapidly gentrifying. Gentrification, as posited by Neil Smith, leads to the systemic remaking of cities through the erasure of existing communities by coalitions of civic and economic power based upon class.[137] If gentrification is about the systemic remaking of cities then the issues of housing, wealth-building, and communal identity are exacerbated. The displacement and migration of Black persons have led to the lack of a centralized Black community. Watts, Crenshaw, and Inglewood once thriving Black communities are rapidly gentrifying. While neighborhoods such as View Park, Leimert Park, and Baldwin Hills are still predominantly Black, there is still no central hub for the Black community. As L.A. is gentrifying and African-American communities are being displaced, what is the role of the Black Church and how should Black pastors respond to gentrification?

The Black Church has historically played a role as the center of spiritual, social, and cultural life. The Black Church in L.A., since the late 1800s, has played a significant role as a force in Black institutional life in L.A. Churches such as First AME, Second Baptist Church, Peoples Independent Church of Christ, Holman United Methodist Church, City of Refuge, West Angeles COGIC, Faithful Central Bible Church provided cultural programming, social and political engagement, and spiritual uplift. As gentrification has displaced Black residents, the Black Churches of L.A. have experienced a crisis. With a lack of a centralized community from which to draw, congregants members drive either from further distances or have transferred

membership to suburban congregations. Black Churches that led the L.A. community are also experiencing a moment of transition as senior leaders retire such as Cecil Chip Murray from

[137] Smith, Neil. 2002. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." *Antipode*, no. 3 (June): 427–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00249.

First AME, Bishop Charles E. Blake from West Angeles COGIC, and Bishop Kenneth Ulmer from Faithful Central Bible Church. Lastly, a crisis of purpose regarding the identity of the church is found with aging congregations, shifting neighborhood demographics, and shrinking budgets.

In describing African-Americans' spiritual and social conditions, W.E.B. Dubois in the *Strivings Of The Negro People* describes a sense of inward struggle, a double consciousness in which the African and the Euro-American identity and heritage is at war within oneself. [138] The Black Church in Los Angeles embodies a duboisian double consciousness. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* writes that "every Black person and every Black institution has participated in making compromises between the poles of accommodation and resistance." [139] Black Pastors in L.A.. must respond to the twin poles of accommodation to the changing nature of the city and the new inhabitants that reside in their communities and resistance to the displacement of communities of color particularly Black communities. Lincoln and Mamiya write, “In their accommodative role, Black churches have been one of the major cultural brokers of the norms, values, and expectations of white society.” [140]

The Black Churches of L.A. occupy a unique position as communities of faith. Dwelling between the poles of resistance and accommodation. The Black Churches in L.A. must wrestle with reimagining their purpose, mission, and existence, focusing upon the spiritual, social, economic, and psychological needs of the Black Community. The question for the Black Churches in L.A. particularly historic congregations with access to resources and power and yet

[138] Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People.”
[139] Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The Black Church in the African-American experience*. (Duke University Press)., pg 14.
[140] Ibid.pg 15,

civically and socially disenfranchised will they resist gentrification or embrace the new residents and inhabitants of L.A. transforming what it means to be Church, what it means to be a Black Church, and the mission and purpose of these communities of faith.

The Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock in *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* articulates that “The Black Church was born for fighting for freedom." [141] The Black Church in L.A. their siblings in New York and Philadelphia were born out of a struggle for racial dignity, equity, and justice. Early congregations such as Second Baptist, First AME, Wesley Chapel, St. Phillips Episcopal, Peoples Independent Church of Christ, and Westminster Presbyterian served the needs of early Black migrants.

Later congregations such as West Angeles COGIC, Crenshaw Christian Center, Faithful Central Bible Church, and the City of Refuge would emerge to serve the diverse Black community in L.A. Some congregations such as Park Hills Community Church in View Park would transition from predominantly white memberships to nearly entirely black membership as neighborhood demographics transitioned. Today these historic congregations have faced significant challenges including membership decline, pastoral turnover, and changing neighborhoods due to gentrification. These congregations compete for parking, affordability as the cost of living rises, and a shrinking pool of persons from which to draw potential membership. As gentrification precedes in Los Angeles and displaces African American residents, Black Churches are faced with the challenges of limited resources, aging memberships, building infrastructure, and changing neighborhoods. The Black Church in L.A. is faced with the challenge of addressing gentrification and its continued relevance in the face of gentrification.

[141] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*, Paperback, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity (New York London: New York University Press, 2020)., pg 13.

Chapter 2

## Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge

Historically, African-American churches were the cultural centers of their communities. African-American churches provided spiritual, social, and cultural uplift through programming ranging from after-school care, housing developments, Alcoholics Anonymous, social services, and health services. Lincoln and Mamiya write, "The Black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of Black America." [142] As Neil Smith argues, gentrification is about the systemic class-remaking of cities. [143] Gentrification is focused on the upward mobility and construction of new communities for the middle class to the detriment of pre-existing communities. The impact of public policies that support gentrification can at best lead to resegregation or, at worst, destruction, erasure, and removal of entire African-American communities across the United States. Gentrification, therefore, leads to physical, spiritual, cultural, and social displacement of African-American communities. If gentrification is a global phenomenon, it must also be understood as a local phenomenon that has effects on particular communities and their economic, social, spiritual, and physical life. The rapid shift in neighborhood demographics highlights the intersectional injustices of housing inequality, racism, and poverty that have already existed in American American urban communities. This project deals with the problem of gentrification and the pastoral responses by African American churches in Los Angeles, California.

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition found Los Angeles to be one of the most intensely gentrified cities in the United States. [144] As the demographics of urban

[142]Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Duke University Press, 1990), 8.
[143] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, 1st ed (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2005).
[144] Richardson, Mitchell, and Edlebi, "Gentrification and Disinvestment 2020."

communities across the nation shift, this project by examining the responses of African American Churches in L.A. to gentrification and developing a preaching resource to address gentrification will provide an effective model for African-American churches across the nation to respond to gentrification in their local context as African-American leaders wrestle with how to effectively guide their congregations in responding to the shifts in their neighborhoods.

As cities are shaped by gentrification and lose African-American residents, African-American persons are separated from the spiritual institutions that provide spiritual, social, and cultural uplift. African-American churches thereby lose stakeholders in their congregations and the larger community. An ecological methodology examines the exchange of energy between sacred spaces and context and how context and place shape one another. This methodology as defined by Katie Day, focuses on interactions between religious spaces and context, interrogating who acts on whom and who and what shapes context and place. [145] This framework will provide a means for analyzing how African-American churches effectively respond to gentrification in their communities by comparing and contrasting how sacred space and context shape each other. As well as how African American clergy respond to the changes and challenges within their communities.

If African-American Churches are to remain the center of African-American cultural life, what is their role in responding to gentrification? How through an ecological approach do African-American Churches create space for human flourishing particularly the continued flourishing of African-Americans? Furthermore, what responsibility do African American Churches hold in creating wealth-building, economic vitality and justice, and communal flourishing without perpetuating harmful ideologies or practices. Utilizing ethnography, I will

[145] Katie Day and Elise M. Edwards, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities*, Routledge Handbooks in Religion (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2021).

examine four African-American congregations of varying denominations located in different neighborhoods in the city of Los Angeles, California. This project will create a model for how African-American congregations can effectively respond to gentrification by contrasting and comparing how these congregations responded to it. Additionally, this project will draw its guidance from the framework for religion and place developed by Rhys Williams and Nancy Eisland. The theological undergirding for this project is a biblical interpretation of Jeremiah 29:7 and racialized theology of place, abundance and prosperity, and social ethics as informed by Dr. Willie Jennings, Dr. Keri Day, and Dr. Robert M. Franklin, and pastoral theology as informed by Dr. Forrest Harris, Dr. Ralph Douglass West, and Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor. Additionally, this project will be informed by a liberationist and self-determination theology as embodied by Leon H. Sullivan and James Cone.

Neighborhoods such as Leimert Park, Crenshaw, Inglewood, Baldwin Hills, View Park, Windsor Hills and much of South Central Los Angeles are being rapidly gentrified. As the demographics of urban communities across the nation shift, this project, by comparing and contrasting the responses of African-American churches in Los Angeles will provide an effective model for African-American churches across the nation to respond to gentrification in their local context as African-American leaders wrestle with how to effectively guide their congregations in responding to the shifts in their neighborhoods. This study by providing a model of how African-American clergy from historic congregations responded to gentrification will equip African-American clergy with the resources and tools to develop an effective pastoral response to gentrification in American-American communities.

Chapter 3

## Research Questions

**Research Question One:**

What part does the African American pastor play in combating gentrification and its attendant intersectional injustices of racial injustice, classism, racism, and housing inequity? The Rev. Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor contends in "Preaching About Crisis in the Community" that "The preacher has the unique responsibility to stand tall in the midst of our moral confusion, our spiritual estrangement, and our lost opportunities and to declare that God is with us in our situation." [146] To create a ministry that is life-giving and spiritually and socially renewing in the African American communities of the twenty-first century, how can the African-American pastor embrace their role as both priest and prophet within the pulpit?

**Research Question Two:**

What role do African American churches in Los Angeles have in addressing gentrification from a biblical and theological perspective? Jeremiah 29:7 (NRSVue) states, “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” The Christian tradition, in particular, the Black Calvinist, Liberationist, and Social Gospel theological traditions exhort individuals and communities to work for the welfare of the city as a means of achieving both individual and

[146] Proctor, Samuel D. *Preaching about Crises in the Community*. 1st ed. Preaching about-- series. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 11.

collective liberation. Isaiah 58:12 (NRSVue) also states, "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." These theological justifications for human flourishing promote both spiritual renewal and material prosperity. Dr. Keri Day argues in *Unfinished Business: Black Women, The Black Church, and the struggle to Thrive in America* that, "The Black Church should advance a more compassionate prosperity gospel that (1) affirms the life-transforming power of faith, and (2) locates affirmative faith within the contexts of many factors, including environment, economics, relationships, and opportunity." [147] How can a liberationist interpretation of scripture and a theology of economic liberation from the Black pulpit offer gentrified communities in Los Angeles a lens of hope, freedom, and liberation?

**Research Question Three:**

African American churches in the north and west, rooted in the social gospel and responding to racial violence, urbanization, and mass migration during the 1920s and 1930s, pioneered institutional churches to serve the lived needs of their communities. [148] For Black migrants to Los Angeles during the 1920s–1960s, churches like the People's Independent Church of Christ, Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles, and First African Methodist Episcopal Church offered hope. From the 1980s to the 2000s, visionary clergy persons like Cecil Chip Murray, Bishop Charles E. Blake, and Bishop Kenneth Ulmer created ministries to address the needs of urban Black communities. What preaching and ministry models might African American churches in Los Angeles need to change if they want to serve their shifting neighborhoods and communities well?

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[147] Day, *Unfinished Business*.
[148] Milton C. Sernett, *Bound For the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration*, The C. Eric Lincoln Series on the Black Experience (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Chapter 4

## Plan of Implementation

**Goal 1:** To empower African American pastors to effectively utilize their pulpits to address economic liberation and social transformation as spiritual practices.

Strategy 1: Identify a cohort of four African American pastors of African American churches in Los Angeles across different neighborhoods, denominations, membership sizes, and socio-economic statuses.

Strategy 2: Survey these four African American pastors regarding the impact of gentrification in their communities, how they view the role of the pastor, their preaching regarding social issues, and their response to gentrification as pastoral leaders utilizing a google survey form. I will then analyze the survey responses to find challenges, opportunities, commonalities, and outliers in how African American pastors are responding to gentrification in L.A.

Strategy 3: Create a three-Sunday sermon preaching commentary on how African American pastors can address gentrification and economic justice from the pulpit.

Evaluation of Goal 1: A survey will be administered to determine the cohort of pastors regarding how gentrification is addressed from the pulpit and the role of the pastor. A follow-up survey will be administered regarding the preaching commentary and its use and effectiveness. At least 50% of participants will indicate that they gained new knowledge and understanding about the importance of preaching about gentrification.

**Goal 2:** To develop an awareness of models of African American pastoral innovation in responding to gentrification.

Strategy 1: To identify three African American pastors of African American churches across the United States that have developed successful ministries in gentrified neighborhoods from various denominations, membership sizes, and socio-economic statuses.

Strategy 2: Survey these three African American pastors regarding the impact of gentrification and their response to it as pastoral leaders utilizing a google survey form. Analyze the survey responses to find challenges, opportunities, commonalities, and outliers in how African American pastors are responding to gentrification nationwide and develop a set of best practices that can be identified from these pastoral leaders.

Strategy 3: Create a resource document on how African American pastors can begin to think about addressing gentrification. Including the best practices that were identified in the surveys and local resources.

Evaluation of goal 2: The successful evaluation of this portion will first be demonstrated through 100% participation of survey participants. Secondly, this project will be able to produce a publishable resource document for African American pastors that could be distributed to local congregations. The success of this will be demonstrated in its being downloaded and utilized by at least three churches in Los Angeles.

**Goal 3:** To raise awareness regarding the role African American Pastors play in addressing gentrification in their local communities.

Strategy 1: Write and Preach three sermons in local L.A. churches regarding the church's responsibility for economic empowerment in regard to gentrification.

Strategy 2: Write an article for USC on the moral responsibility of the Black Pulpit to address economic empowerment.

Strategy 3: Present a lecture or webinar for local L.A. clergy on how to preach on issues of social transformation and economic empowerment such as gentrification.

Evaluation of goal 3: The success of this goal will be determined by at least five pastors attending the webinar or lecture and 50% of those who attended responding to a post-webinar or lecture survey. The long-term success of this project will be determined by garnering survey data, observational responses, and examples to incorporate in an article or book that can be written regarding African American pastoral leadership and gentrification.

# Chapter 5

## Ministerial Competencies

### Competency Goal One: Theologian

This competency goal is focused on developing theological reflection. For the purposes of this project, "a theologian engages actively in biblical study and theological reflection in the context of the contemporary world, in an effort to continue to grow and become more effective in interpreting the word in a particular time and place." This competency is important to this project by developing a theological, biblical, and historical rationale for the role of African American pastors in addressing gentrification. This competency clarifies that theological reflection on a justice issue empowers pastors to provide a biblical,ethical, moral, and historical rationale for why their congregations must develop innovative strategies to address gentrification within their local communities. As a theological practitioner one must think critically about the underpinnings of African American pastoral identity in order to create resources that will effectively serve African American congregations. In surveying the work of my assigned ministerial leader the Rev. Dr. Ralph West, theologian or the pastor as priest is an important aspect of ministerial identity and practice in order to effectively empower African American congregations. Dr. West critically engages biblical, theological, and historical reflection in his preaching in order to create for his congregation the theological and spiritual rationale for engaging the work of justice in the world.

Competency Goal Two: Prophetic Agent

Central to this project is the cultivation of my own and other African American pastors and clergy prophetic agency. Utilizing the pulpit, social media, the written word, and other forms of media the prophetic agent speaks truth to power within their local congregations and communities. A prophet is one who does not "foretell" so much as "forth-tell" the truth as defined by New York Theological Seminary. "As a prophet, a minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society." An awareness of gentrification as a social injustice will be cultivated and will sensitize African American pastoral leaders to the spiritual and ethical implications of gentrification and cultivate a prophetic response to this issue within their communities. The Rev. Dr. West has operated as a prophetic agent encouraging his congregation to develop an awareness to the challenges facing their congregation and community and thus developing ministries that speak to the needs within both congregation and community.

Competency Goal Three: Leader

The core of this project is developing a model of African American pastoral leadership that addresses social injustices such as gentrification as part of one's spiritual vocation. This project seeks to empower African American pastors to develop the necessary skills of leadership that empower their congregations to address the challenges that face their communities. Dr. West identifies the African American pastorate as historically containing three typologies of pastoral leadership but believes that these must be combined in order to develop an effective model of

leadership that addresses gentrification and other challenges within African American communities.

**Timeline**

| Date | Task/Activity | Tools to Complete Task | Person Responsible |
|---|---|---|---|
| 03/2023 | Submit DMin Proposal | | |
| 03/2023 | Proposal approved by Director | | |
| 04/2023 | Goal 1: identify four local pastors with site team members. | | |
| | Goal 2: identify three national pastors to interview | | |
| 05/2023 | Meet with Site Team regarding ministerial competencies | Zoom | |
| | Meet with Advisor | Zoom | |
| 06/2023 | Goal 1 | | |
| | Reach out to the four LA pastors | | |
| | Reach out to the three national pastors | | |
| | Develop google surveys for Goal 1 and Goal 2 | Google forms | |
| | Send out surveys for Goal 1 and Goal 2 | | |
| 07/2023 | Write Preaching Commentary | | |
| 08/2023 | Begin analyzing data from Goal 1 and Goal 2 compiling into a | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | document | | |
| | Check in with site team | | |
| 09/2023 | Preach in Local LA Churches for Goal 3 | | |
| | Collect survey data from preaching commentary and resource document | | |
| 10/2023 | Lecture/Host a webinar for Goal 3 | | |
| | Send post webinar survey | | |
| 11/2023 | Edit resource document based on webinar survey | | |
| 12/2023-3/2024 | Write Dissertation | | |
| 3/2024 | Full DP project proposal completed | | |
| | Review with Site Team | | |
| | Rewrite | | |
| 03/2024 | Submit DP | | |
| 04/2024 | Defend DP | | |
| 05/2024 | Graduate | | |

**Budget**

| | |
|---|---|
| Travel for Intensives and Graduation | $3,000 |
| Hotel for Intensives and Graduation | $3,000 |
| Thank You Gift Cards for survey participants | $160 |
| Editor for Dissertation | $1,000 |

# Appendix B: Interview Protocol

## Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
2. What are some of the changes you've seen in your church during and now after gentrification?
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in this neighborhood during and now after gentrification?
4. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
6. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
7. What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
8. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked but didn't?

# Appendix C: Interviews

**Rev. Alvin Tunstill – Trinity Baptist Church (West Adams, LA)**
Trinity Baptist Church – American Baptist Churches USA and National Baptist Convention.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. The pastor here for 27 years
2. How would you describe your congregation
    a. 105 years old, committed to Christ, very faithful, the last two pastors had earned doctorates, so education is very strong. $900,000 in the scholarship fund to support education. Strong population of working-class members. Many of whom were factory workers, many people of our community lost jobs when the factories left. If you don't have jobs people don't stay. Some of the jobs African Americans had such as contractors are now going to the Hispanic community. Even positions in hotels etc. are no longer held by Black community. Those positions are upgrading their salaries because of the protests of the Hispanic community.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The numbers have declined, at one point Trinity had 1,000 members. Now those numbers have dwindled because African Americans are leaving. A million African Americans have left since 1996 when he arrived. It's been hard trying to reach the Hispanic community because of the language barrier and the style of worship. There are also great Hispanic pastors and churches in the community.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The neighborhood has gone from majority African American to mostly Hispanic. In the last 5 years there are more white residents. 3 white businesses have opened across the street. A coffee shop which he frequents has a mainly white clientele. 27 years ago you would never see white people in the neighborhood. Some white visitors have come to the Church. There are 3 white members but they are married to Black Women.
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
    a. Younger people are going to go where they can get jobs. 3 sons in their 30s. Ex. His son is economically well-off in Texas moved back to LA but can't afford to stay here. Cost of living is a major factor. He thinks education will help. We used to think Education was the answer but economic development needs to be there too. More job creation and affordable housing. More people would stay if they could afford to live here.

b. He was a Pastor in Queens, NY. They would pay high school seniors to be interns at a Black Bank. In NY they would intern at Carter Bank, the Mayor's Office, and a Congressperson's office. The church would pay for them and the students would intern. They have done that in L.A. at KLJH the radio station, the One United and Broadway Federal (Black Banks), we don't have the same number of businesses here in LA. In the past he tried to get Black Churches to organize students to do this. In the past FAME had students at Disneyland.
c. He wanted to organize Black Churches for the church to pay the salary and have the student's intern. They started with 5 students in NY to 25. At Trinity they started with 25-34/40. Churches can take ownership of how their young people are doing? It's something every church can do to make sure that young people have summer jobs. Students learning about investments ex. Investing at places like Merrill Lynch.

6. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
    a. Preaching makes all the difference. We have to talk about economic justice, we have to talk about economic self-determination. We need to take that on ourselves. We have such grand and diverse views it becomes harder to find an agreement point. The right preacher and the right leadership can draw the right people in.
    b. West Angeles is a good example with housing, FAME is a good example with providing jobs, bringing the issue of when someone doesn't get the justice they don't deserve.
    c. Late pastor was J.H. Jackson of the National Baptist Convention- we need to move from protest to production- own our own business, banks.
    d. We've lost more land than we've ever owned since the 1920s. We need to own our own land, produce business, we need to also include other racial groups in our work around economic justice.
7. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
        i. Trying to rebuild Sunday School (specifically high school).
            1. Reaching out to parents and grandparents encouraging them to join the PTA. Find out what the students need and what they are doing after school. Then you can help guide and direct their future.
            2. Ex. Kids interested in music and connecting them with musicians in the areas. How can we impact the schools? Wanting to get the Church more connected to schools.
            3. With gentrification it's harder to find a community and connect to that local community. Members have gone to Dorsey, Crenshaw, Manual Arts- these were main African American Schools. Now

they are mainly Hispanic. How can the Church connect with those Black Students and help who they are. Connect with the schools through the PTA.

4. Bringing in youth-oriented leaders into the Church. Allowing youth to lead with technology.

8. *What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out? (see question 9)*
9. Are there specific resources you think would be helpful for pastors to think about gentrification?
    a. A resource on thinking about jobs and housing. A recent undergrad would struggle to live in L.A. because of the affordability of L.A. Something has to change if we're going to attract more young adults to L.A. The Black community doesn't have that same intergenerational living situation. We don't seem to have the same intergenerational context. All our money is going to rent and food you can't get a place on your own.
    b. Jobs and Affordable Housing. Not enough housing. We have towns like Huntington Beach say they don't want to put together plans for affordable housing. As a pastor we have to say that's not right but you need a plan to accommodate more people. Every county, not just L.A. Country.
10. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked but didn't?
    a. The way we understand faith and think about religion we have to expand the body of Christ. Ex. If they go to USC people say they wouldn't want to go to a Baptist Church because they think it's going to condemn them whether they are LGBTQIA. The UCC has been open. The Baptists need to be more like Jesus and do not judge. The other major lesson is showing love. If you see a brother without a coat you help the brother. We need to get back to the fundamentals of how we can help and that makes a major difference. A lot of anger in America, anti-Church in America, how can we turn our witness around. We help people to feel appreciated and welcomed. It's a challenge.

**Rev. Dr. Ken Walden – Holman United Methodist Church (West Adams-Los Angeles)**

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. Since the summer of 2020 almost 3 years
2. How would you describe your congregation

    a. Historically Black Church, liturgical, high-steeple, formal, upper-middle class, highly educated, very traditional with impressive elements of diversity and progressivism.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. How do people find affordable housing?
    b. Grieving what used to be or what was- grieving the departure of what the community used to be.
    c. With gentrification we have the start and presence of non-traditional churches that cater to a multicultural congregation with cutting technology, nontraditional, and not steeped in black church tradition but enticing to a younger black generation. More choices of worship for children and grandchildren are more appealing.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The surrounding community has changed from non-black residents and non-black people purchasing homes.
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
    a. The pastor has to deal with the housing crisis in Los Angeles
    b. He has been involved in conversations with the mayor and members of city council.
    c. Holman is politically engaged and partners with civic organizations, endowments, and institutions. Works with housing and economic justice.
    d. Ensuring that resources are shared and given to all peoples.
6. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
    a. Economics is one of the top ten topics the Bible speaks about from justice to revelation. How you spend, loan, and give money. Money comes up a lot, Jesus talks about it.
    b. We live in a spiritual world, relational world, and economic world. Money doesn't solve all problems but it can solve them. Money and financial literacy should be taught. A lot of communities of color are financially illiterate. That's why they have been preyed upon by financial institutions and white people.
7. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE:  specific ministries?
    b. Holman has a CDC
        i. Holman has a job training program for young people. Churches should consider a CDC they partner with the county and the city for different grants and programs targeted towards young people.
        ii. We are the largest county by population of any county in the country. L.A. county is larger than every state in America except for 5. There's a lot of

congestion. There's the blessing and burden of diversity. Churches have a role publicly and subliminally have a role to say everyone matters and is acknowledged and loved.

iii. Gentrification systematically pushes people out but the church affirms, loves, and supports people.

1. Homeless ministry

8. *Are there specific resources you think would be helpful for pastors to think about gentrification or the future of the Black Church in L.A.*
    a. Holman has a food storehouse and is getting that restarted with a local food bank. Keys to the city.
    b. Churches should look at food and how people are healthy.
    c. Job training
    d. Any aspect of housing-homelessness or coordination with housing.
    e. Financial literacy
    f. The Church can't do everything but can do something.
9. *What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?*
10. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?
    a. Churches to be clear on their identity and use that as a strength. A point of pride for Holman- For black people if they are in urban areas, they inherited white churches from white flight. Then black churches moved in and tried to upkeep the building. Holman built every building on their campus, their sanctuary, education, and office building. Holman prides itself in being self-sustaining, partnerships with local communities that bring in local forms of income.
    b. Longest serving pastor was Rev. Dr. L.L. White was here 27 years from 40s-50s he had a fulltime Chinese-American associate pastor his wife was African American but it was light years ahead.
    c. Rev. Lawson increased the elements of diversity; he had 4-5 white Associate Pastors. He addressed racial, LGBTQIA, and economic justice. They are the church of the bells and ring the bells of justice.
    d. Broadening the partnerships Holman has. Ex. Broadening partnerships with places like USC, relationships with UCLA, increasing relationship with Charles Drew Medical.
    e. Churches need to build relationships with surrounding institutions such as local hospitals, universities, the memories of mistrust of public hospitals and institutions who are 55 and over still linger. So, building partnership and trust to overcome those barriers. Holman was a COVID vaccination center. The church is a safe place and respected institution. If Holman is doing that it's a good thing to do.

11. Bonus Question: Does the split in the UMC affect Holman in any way
    a. Cal-Pac is the most progressive conference in the UMC. There are some most conservative elements of Holman. Holman is the most progressive Black Church he has pastored. There are LGBTQIA leaders in the congregation who raised their kids in the Church. The majority of the congregation would support the LGBTQIA community. 2,400 churches have left the UMC. The UMC will have fewer resources to give to churches that are struggling. The conference looks to Holman to contribute and will continue to do so.
12. Additional Resources
    a. Gentrification- own a duplex, the pastor's home, and own the church property.
    **b. We need religious leaders who understand the significance of property and buy as much as possible and hold on to it!!! Beyond their main sanctuary campus. Buy as much as possible. Expand our territory but we need to buy physical land. They own enough land to build Senior's housing.**
    **c. Hollywood uses their parking lot for films -$100,000. It's because they have the land and the room. Parking helps them. Religious leaders need to know the significance of land.**
    d. We need multiple sources of income and you can only pass the offering plate a certain number of times. We need multiple sources of income to support the Church.
    e. Gentrification impacts 1. Identity- it's relation to belonging and allyship, who am I in this community 2. Economics- can I afford to live here, where is this money coming from and going to. 3. Empowerment- often times when we talk about gentrification has a negative connotation particularly people of color. How can religious leaders help them to feel empowered?

**Dr. William Epps- Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles**
Conventions: American Baptist Churches USA, National Baptist Convention USA, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Lott Carey Convention
**http://www.secondbaptistchurchla.org/history-2.html**

**Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe your congregation?
    a. A historic congregation. Second Baptist is 138 years old. It is the oldest Black Baptist congregation in the city of Angeles. In 1885, 22 years after the Civil War, what made them think they could come to a city of 12,000 less than 10% were Black. They had faith to believe they could accomplish much.
    b. Four founding pastors from 1885-1920. Short tenured pastors.
        i. Rev. S.C. Pierce 1885-1887
        ii. Rev. C.H. Anderson 1887-1907
        iii. J.L. McCoy 1908-1915
        iv. H.D. Prowd 1915-1920
        v. 1885-1920 were the founding years
    c. 20th Century (WWI and WWII, Civil Rights Movement, etc.)
    d. It is an older congregation that has to remake itself. Rebrand itself as a viable congregation that can provide or meet the needs of 21st century humanity. Political, spiritual, physical, human motivations. What does that abundant life look like? Everything we do brings about destruction and decay but God in Christ shows us how to have abundant life.
    e. Many are looking for a cross-less, crise-less faith. We are looking for prosperity vs. looking at the necessity of the cross. God was in Christ reconciling himself to us. God is willing to sacrifice Godself to show you how much you care for yourself. God never gives up on you even when you give up on God. We find ways not to follow Jesus. Jesus is the consummate expression of the love of God and a people imagined in God.
    f. There is a justice role for the church: we are to uplift the oppressed, not diminish people's value and worth.

    g. Christianity speaks to the quintessential nature of the human experience (Incarnational theology)
    h. We are called to be compassionate people, look at how we justify mistreating people, categorizing people, labeling people. We place strict structures trying to control others when we are out of control ourselves.
2. How long have you been here?
    a. Pastor for 35 years- 36 in October.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The neighborhood demographic has changed drastically. When the building was established in 1926 it was a Black community and people walked to church. Then people moved west to Baldwin Hills, Ladera Heights. The neighborhood now is 90% Hispanic. They attempted a Spanish congregation with the ABCUSA with Dr. Enrique Torres but did not succeed. They have lent the Church to Hispanic congregations for week-long meetings. The church has absentee landlords in the community, how does the Church show they care about them. 2nd and 4th Saturdays they do a food giveaway, they have a child program that is 99% Hispanic, and do a vaccination clinic. They want to develop marketing materials in Spanish. At some point they want to develop a Spanish speaking congregation at Second Baptist so that the community can claim this is ours too.
    b. Does the Church need to be a place of justice and equality for everyone?
    c. They need to develop a vibrant worship service with music that is appealing and inviting to people (Praise and Worship)
    d. Programs that address needs of a contemporary society.
    e. When he was at First Baptist Winston-Salem, they had a consumer education newsletter by MBA's who were members of the Church. You need people with particular skill sets.
    f. What is the purpose of the auxiliaries and what is your outreach plan?
    g. How will you engage new people to participate?
    h. What will the media committee do when they move into a new building? (Record every Tuesday for the broadcast)
    i. They will need screens in the Church, streaming, and technicians for excellent sound quality.
    j. Again, highlighting the quality of the music and updating it.
    k. Hopes its successor will preach a gospel of faithfulness. I Hope they will have someone who appreciates their history and moves them gingerly to where they need to be.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. See question #3

5. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
6. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
7. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
8. What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
9. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?

Additional Comments:

- Dr. Epps went to Bishop College and then attended Andover-Newton, Calvary Baptist Haverhill was a student congregation where Black students served as pastor. He served as an interim for 2-3 months. He got ordained during Christmas Time and then became pastor while he was a student. Except, he didn't know he was doing- funerals, visitation, Christian education, and preaching. He then left after 8 months for Abyssinian.
- He worked with Youth at Abyssinian and Christian Education, they had a school in NYC training Black Church members for Christian Ed, an older member told him why don't we let you tell us what you need us to do.
- First Baptist Winston, Second Baptist Detroit, Second Baptist L.A.
- First 6-8 months list (concerns of Church, strengths and weaknesses, what do we need to do to maintain our viability) Have everyone share what we wanted to do and how we wanted to be. Get the buy-in of every member. Together we set an agenda. Dictatorial pastors it's hard-to-get people to do what you want. Your role as Pastor is not to be domineering and control you. Your role is under shepherd to help you foster your faith and help you do your ministry. In sermon prep learn from your members. Show respect to your people and the ministry they have established.
- Different churches require different types of pastors.
- Dr. Epps has only pastored historic Black Churches and done so successfully.
- His vision was to buy up the block
- His job was to love Second Baptist as their pastor. The Church is the Lord's bride and we are the bridegroom's friend to support the bride.
- Be accountable and responsible to those who I have placed into your keeping.

Additional Question: What would be a helpful resource

- A strategic model for preparing pastors for facing the variety of challenges they will face in the 21st century.
    - Gentrification
    - Secularization of society
    - Multiculturalism

    - Interfaith Advocacy
    - Political Activism
    - Spiritual Growth and Development
- What are resources for that? Seminars or classes to talk to pastors about these challenges.
- Seminar on **The role of the Pastor in a changing society**
- Categories is different than based in Urban Churches vs. Suburban Churches
- Clarify the pastor's role to be faithful to their role in believers in Christ.
- Collaborative leader and pastor
- How does the pastor see their role?
- The role of the pastor, how they see themselves, wrong aspirations and desires (making a name for ourselves!)
- The best compliment a pastor can get is that they knew how to pastor us. God loved folk through Christ into receiving and accepting redemption, renewal, and restoration.
- **Relationship: do you shape your spouse into who you want her to be or do you allow her to tell you who she is and then help her grow into the best version of herself. The issue is you.**
- Pastoring is a collaborative relationship.

What is the future for Historic Black Churches?

- He thinks it's bright.
- The lord establishes the Church
- We are supposed to be advancing against the gates of hell! Hell is supposed to box you in but the Lord will make sure the Church survives.
- The African American Action Fund – Lily 20 million to help them maintain their viability and relevance.
- Black Churches period needs to survive but he thinks the future is bright. It may be smaller, it may exert a large influence in-spite of its size, be more involved politically, socially, politically, and culturally. It will be a hybrid form of community (digital-in-person) The church can expand in ways that are new and not imagined before.
- The church's mission is to serve the marginalized and measuring ourselves by secular standards
- How do we get back to a biblical understanding of the Church
- Biblical Faith and Religion are not synonymous
- Let the Bible speak to people out of the soil, with the situations that people are facing, what God is calling them to be.
- We need to be re-educated! Drop religion
- Congregation of believers in Christ, a Fellowship of the faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Biblical Faith is about a God who pursues us. Religion is about us pursuing God. God comes to fellowship with you and what do you do- you hide.
- We turned on God but God wouldn't give up on you (biblical faith)

Side Notes:

- History shows what can be possible against all odds.
- FAITH (forging ahead ingenious through hindrances).
- We have a responsibility to maintain that which was handed to us from those who preceded us.
- He and Ralph West are friends both went to Bishop College
- Epps is an extemporaneous preacher

**Rev. Dr. Seth Pickens**
Guidance Church of Religious Science
Former Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church (less than a mile away)

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. Just installed April 30,2023
2. How would you describe your congregation?
    a. 56-year-old congregation, new thought and new age. Older aging congregations 60s-80s. 99% Black. Most of them are former Baptists who fought weighed down by the doctrine. *His dissertation is on Pastoral leadership in the Black Church.* Rev. Ike style theology- God is within all things are possible. When they were in their 30s-50s. A lot of retirees. Only a handful of kids/teens
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. There are geographic dispersion factors, economic factors, and people are moving. The fate of the life of the Church is within the Church. Both Guidance and Zion Hill still own their buildings. Booming Hispanic congregations could buy the buildings. Younger generations aren't in the game. The 40-year-old who owns their home has an education and doesn't sit in the pews.
4. General Notes
    a. When they were 35 they had the house, they had professional jobs. It's a major shift within the Church. The tool is a revival
    b. 1/3 of 1500s is Reformation
    c. 1/3 of 1600s KJV Bible
    d. 1/3 of 1700s Great Awakening
    e. 1/3 of 1800s 2nd Great Awakening
    f. 1/3 of 1900s Azusa Street
    g. 1/3 of 21st century (Seth thinks our theology is focused on the worship of Jesus vs. teachings of Jesus)

    h. Religious Science explains theological systems empirically. College roommates, line brothers, etc. aren't sitting in Church. They want a word, they want wisdom. People in their 30s-40s who've got gentrification, inflation, white supremacy don't want to go to Grandma's Church.
    i. Pastors are blaming the city council to fix the Church. You know the way? Jesus says you know the way. For Seth-meditation, Buddhism, Iyanla, tapping, Chakras provide insights into our faith. He thinks we are missing inner wisdom and knowledge.
    j. You've got to be civic but the work of renewing the Church. (Gordon Ramsay-slicing, Kobe it's the gym, The Church it's not civic engagement meetings -prayer, listening, writing, teaching, learning, fellowship. Getting in the lab. Seek first the kingdom of heaven.)
    k. The Renewal of the local Church- The Kerygma without the fluff. The fluff without the Kerygma. The spiritual power of our grandparents was that they were in the Church all day. Our modern moment has a different context. Jesus came to show us the light and the way. His definition of the good news- we are divine, we are made in God's image, life and light. Let me live that.
5. We have a different context (gentrification/inflation/professional responsibilities and a different sense of time. But there is a spiritual hunger?) How do we reimagine places like Guidance or Zion Hill?
    a. The community already exists (ex. It was my Yoga class). The wall between sacred/secular is knocked down. There is a wall between sacred/secular. If you knock the wall down light is going to win. Do we trust ourselves to be in the world around us and to engage in it? We have a hierarchical approach to the Church.
6. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
7. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
8. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
    a. It's about leadership. The pastor's role is to lead. Spiritual director and Senior Minister. Pastor means shepherd and it applies I'm a human you are a sheep. There's a sense of I'm different even if they shun it. At Guidance it's a teaching. Discipleship is learning. Jesus says I don't call you disciples, I call you friends. Let's learn from one another. Leadership is not taught in seminary. Progressive ministry- Atheist dialogues, LGBT inclusion, voice crying in the wilderness. Different drummer. Leadership should be taught. Ed.D is in educational leadership because discipleship is learning. Self-Knowledge can lead. Pastors are burnt out. Pastors in their 50s and 60s are burnt out and discouraged. The seminary's enrollment is down. Half the people don't want to be pastors. The people don't want to be there.

    b. Bi-vocational realities are now facing pastors because the Church is in decline.
9. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
10. What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
11. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?
    a. This dissertation is for me! My influence, perspective, it will live on through me. Break down your whole dissertation into a 10 slide PowerPoint. This project is yours! It's not going to be a NYTimes best seller. It's just an assignment. Give them what they ask for and get on with your life. Just get it done. Passion project. There's a game- how little can I do and get this dissertation done with all of its excellence.

Pastor's mental health- increased learning- confront tough theological questions. Ten Steps (Barna)- willingness of leaders to do that. Pastoring 15 years ago isn't the same today. The old thing has come back. Equipping. The role of the pastor is equipping the saints. He teaches meditation, he was in the peace corp-engaged with traditional Haitian spirituality. As my generation becomes wealthier- there's 500 churches we don't want to go to.

**Rev. Dr. Barry Settle**
Ward AME Church

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. Since October 2022 (8 months)
2. How would you describe your congregation?
    a. In a traditional AME Church, the majority of the members are 50 plus, predominantly African American 95%, socio-economically diverse, the church is 120 years old.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in your church during and now after gentrification?
    a. There isn't a lot of change in how it impacted the Church. The Church isn't a community church anymore. People live in Carson, Pasadena, Inland Empire, and Long Beach. People go to worship spaces they want and not in the community. Commuter congregation.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in this neighborhood during and now after gentrification?
    a. The neighborhood is a Hispanic community and there hasn't been a lot of evidence of that changing. There is a big student population due to USC, the church rents out houses to USC students. The community is predominantly Hispanic and Black.
5. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
    a. Preaching has a role in economic justice. Hasn't thought about thinking about gentrification in his sermons but the Black Church has been the center of economic justice and bringing awareness beyond just thinking about heaven but caring for the poor, voting rights, and affirmative action.
6. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
    a. The pastor has a responsibility because congregants are members of the community. We have a biblical responsibility to address the lived experiences of members.
7. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
    b. Social Media and the virtual space are ways to engage congregations more effectively. We have to master and invest in the virtual space for it to be effective. Podcasts or engaging members virtually. Education- partnering with community organizations. Fitness challenge with members to walk 15 minutes a day. Partnerships with Crenshaw YMCA.

    c. Financial literacy.
8. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked but didn't?
    a. Education: provide resources like virtual free webinars (30-45 minutes) on topics like gentrification, dealing with neighborhood change, training or access for seniors on virtual space. Resourcing-Equipment for seniors iPad, etc

**Pastor James K. McKnight**
Congregational Church of Christian Fellowship

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. Pastor for 18 years
2. How would you describe your Congregation
    a. A struggling congregation. Struggling to find its unique contribution to the community and its unique contribution to the community of believers. It's a loving community. Membership is 100 people and the average age is 50s and older (some young families and some older families). Congregation with a unique founding in the 1940s a Black Minister, Japanese Minister, and White Minister established the Church. The white and Japanese minister left after a few years. Left to a Harold Kingsley who was a black minister. A multiracial congregation in the 1940s with 3 pastors. Feels as a pastor that it's a struggle- equipping the saints and the great commission. The challenge of using business metrics with building churches.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The church has historically been a Commuter church. The demographic shifts in the neighborhood have not impacted the membership. In the past the neighbors have not liked the congregation.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. The neighborhood is Sugar Hill which used to be a Black affluent neighborhood. It is now young progressive white families that are coming into the neighborhood. used to be older black folks.
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
    a. Kingdom perspective and inclusivity lenses. Whoever is there you are trying to get them as Jesus as lord. Whoever is the neighborhood, that's who you are called to serve. How is worship not so culturally specific that people can get it?
6. What are resources that would be helpful?
    a. Resources to help with best practices, demographic data for communities (Missioninsite), survey on common ideas on Christian perspectives. What are the common ideas in this community about issues of faith? How do people view the idea or lack thereof of a community church. Issues for children and demographic data for households for children. Funding opportunities and grants for Churches.
7. Is the UCC helpful belonging to a predominately white denomination

    a. Be Jesus people but don't fool with the UCC.
8. What is the future of the Black Church? As demographics are shifting what in our history might be proven to be helpful for churches that are committed to being a community church.
    a.
9. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?

**Rev. Dr. Najuma Smith**
Word of Encouragement Community Church
Non-Denominational (Dr. Smith was raised at Second Baptist under Kilgore and Epps. After high school I became AME. In 2014 stepped away from AME)

General Notes:

- People want God but they struggle with some of the Dogma. The AME Discipline was a form of Dogma.
- Word of Encouragement is a place for all people.
- Inclusive- Same Gender, Trans, Queer folks should feel welcome in Church.
- They are an affirming congregation that welcomes people as their whole -selves.
- Started it as a non-denominational church to be a place for all people.
- The church has a lot of virtual members in Mississippi, New York, Louisiana
- Hunger and thirst for the word, God, and spirit, and people want to see that engagement in the real world.
- They do a lot of events
- People want to see their Christianity lived out, serving, giving, and doing things for others. Does it make sense for my day-to-day life? I need to apply what you are preaching to my day-to-day life. It has to be practical, it just can't be churchy. The sermons people hold onto are the sermons that hold onto their real lives.
- Sermons that are applied to the realities of people's lives. Sermons must provide real solutions. How do I take these sermons and apply them to my practical challenges?
- Sermons have to be practical. She listens for practical applications**. Application is Key**
- People are bombarded with so much that it is hard to decipher what is true and what is not. They are exposed to so much. People are confused so how do I help them to go back to the basics? There is so much out there that we can't control it. Culture vs. Heritage. Clarity
- There's been a return to African Spiritual Traditions? How do we address that?
- **Applicable sermons, addressing cultural trends (ATR, AST), offer clarity on the basics.**
- Pastors of this era have to be informed on a lot more than pastors in past generations. (Social Media and social connection)
- They are currently using Bill Winston's book on the Kingdom of God
- Sermon Series helps (on books and the biblical text)
- Teaching people how to study
- Prone to everything because they don't study.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been here?
    a. Church started in 2014
2. Describe your congregation
    a. Adult Congregation (30 and up), Oldest member is 83. A pocket of children and grandchildren. Lots of entrepreneurs and lots of people in the entertainment agency. Lots of artists and playwrights. Most members don't work 9-5. Not a lot of corporate people. Majority Black Church. They are seeing an uptick in seniors because they minister to a senior facility nearby. Largely female church 5% of the congregation are men mainly husbands and sons of members. You attract who you are to the congregation.
    b. Theologically- Becoming Sound in their theology. A driving force since the church was launched in 2014. Bible Study is key. Content, Context, where do certain doctrines come from. Consistent attendees become clear about the word. Bible Study is like going to seminary. Books, homework, wrestling with ideas. There is a sound base. For a few seven years she was a Dean at Southern California School of Ministry at Center of Hope.
    c. Church started in 2014- 2020 pandemic hits, and 3 years online. That challenges a new church. They are back and now they need to be reground as a congregation.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
    a. People still see the Church as a place to gather with their like kind. The demographic shift is Monday-Saturday. So, it's changing their communities and neighborhoods. Work environments and schools don't look the same. Church and church activities are becoming the place to gather with Black folks. Black kids. The Church is becoming the place where community hubs for Black folks and people can gather.
    b. Rebuilding the church as a center of community and the center for community/church
    c. Church became a place of performance during success/prosperity. Now we need the church as a family/community.
4. What resources would be helpful for Pastors in dealing with gentrification and other challenges?
    a. Money (capital for ministry)
    b. Technology- how do you utilize and walk through how to use tech (social media, AI, all these other tools)? The resources to make that staff, people, training on how to do that.
    c. Connection with corporate opportunities. Where is there an opportunity for corporate sponsorships and community partnerships? Leverage resources- grants, corporate sponsorships such as Target, etc. Partner with larger community

organizations. (Partnerships/Corporate Partnerships/Investments/Other ways to do business/outside streams of income)

i. Backpack giveaway – partnering with Target, etc.

5. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked but didn't?
    a. Succession Planning- how does succession planning play a role?
    b. Young Adults- they left the church but haven't left the Church.
    c. Seniors- what is happening to the seniors in our community, they are living longer, how do we utilize our wisdom base? All of the seniors are women. Resurge of senior ministries. Folks getting around in their 70s and 80s.
    d. A resource that comes out of this project- How are we helping those who are the new leading voices in this generational leadership shift? You are the leading voice now what. What is that toolkit?
6. Transitions in Pastoral Leadership in L.A.
    a. Pastor Murray is 94 and so that voice has gone away
    b. Those voices are gone now of elder leadership.
    c. The shift into leadership has now shifted.
    d. No longer Murray, Jones, Ulmer, Blake
    e. There are new voices that have come up now and are leaning to it.
    f. Who's running the ship for Black Church in LA?
    g. Worries about who will lead or who will lead wrong?

**Bishop John Mark Richardson**
New Journey Ministries COGIC/New Journeys COGIC
Church of God in Christ

Interview Questions

1. **How long have you been here?**
    a. Started pastoring in 1987/ Installed in May 1988. Served with Bishop McKinney. Took over a Church that had 15-18 members. Dad had been the founder of the Church. Pastoring is not about the title but it's about being in the hearts of the people. That's what makes you a pastor. Not your preaching skill. It's not about the title, it's about the journey that you take with them and that is what solidifies the relationships. Ministered in Watts during the riots in 1992. Feeding people, ministering to people. A cloud of depression came over the community in 1992. People began to move to Riverside. They felt their ministry wasn't conducive to the Watts area. Felt they could serve a community people were moving into. Hispanics moved into Watts as Blacks moved out. Rented out their fellowship hall to Hispanic churches.
    b. God shifted them from that ministry. They thought they were going to move to Riverside but God sent them to Hawthorne. Been here since 1992. Young Blacks left Watts and moved to Hawthorne. Black and Hispanic. 30% Black. People were moving to Marino Valley, Long Beach, and the greatest population increase was Hawthorne because of the apartments.
    c. God brought them back to this community they first lived in Hawthorne.
    d. They planted a church off instinct
    e. Seminar by the Friends Church
    f. God sent them to Hawthorne. They went to the Chamber of Commerce to ask about the needs, Robert H. Schuller on church planting.
2. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>your church</u> during and now after gentrification?
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in <u>this neighborhood</u> during and now after gentrification?
4. What role does preaching have in shaping your congregation's view of economic justice?
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification or economic injustice?
6. What can churches (congregations) do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
    a. PROBE: specific ministries?
7. What can community leaders do now to better empower those who are still here, but left out?
8. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?

Faithful Central Bible Church (Dr. J-P Foster)

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been senior pastor
    a. Since February 5th,2023 (installed) and at FCBC since 2015
2. How would you describe your congregation?
    a. Predominantly Black Church, Upper-Middle Class congregation (entertainers, rappers, singers, NBA players).
    b. Theologically- roots are Baptist, it's a Bible Church. Embraced the charismatic movement and shifted from Baptist to a more Charismatic worship style. That was a theological shift under the bishop's leadership and caused the church to grow larger.
3. What are some of the changes you've seen in this neighborhood due to gentrification?
    a. More white and asian families are moving into Inglewood, sparked by So-Fi stadium being built, housing being built (luxury apartments to gated communities). It is changing the price point of the community, gated communities starting 1 million to 1.2 million impacts buyers. The market is increasing making it difficult to purchase a home. People who couldn't buy in Beverly Hills are now moving into Inglewood. The intuit dome is also causing gentrification along with the So-Fi stadium. The cost of living in LA is driving people to Inglewood.
4. What are some of the changes you've seen in your church due to gentrification? Have you had to reimagine ministry to your community due to changes in the local neighborhood?
    a. Re-Imagining ministry doesn't have to happen. Just focus on teaching the Bible.
    b. White families, asian families, and hispanic families are now coming to FCBC. It's the depth of how the BIble is taught and it's not a hollering or screaming sermon.
    c. Whatever the community looks like that is who we are trying to help. 60% Hispanic in Inglewood. Family events, community events, a safe place for kids, child development center,
    d. Counseling Center- mental health resources (LMU and Pepperdine students)
    e. Exegete the text and context. Use examples that are inclusive in preaching to reach a broad congregation. Examples aren't based on race unless preaching on issues of race and matters of race. What is God's response to addressing matters of race?
    f. If you get gentrified and gentrify your sermons you will lose your current congregation.
    g. Training staff and volunteers to greet and welcome diverse newcomers and make them feel comfortable. Don't stop being black and help people feel welcome in general. Have staff and volunteers trained with a level of excellence.

    h. Intentional welcome of diverse newcomers personally but don't have to use the pulpit to do that. Evangelistic, discipleship, shepherding, that is what creates a culture of hospitality and welcome. Not necessarily from the pulpit.
5. What is the pastor's role in addressing issues of gentrification?
    a. Gentrification impacts minority communities. Intentional moves to support the current community but there are investors who don't care. There are people who prey on communities of color. Explaining the process of economics and what are the impacts of gentrification on a community. The community is changing, from the pulpit they said do not sell your house. They offered workshops on the process of gentrification, how to think about economics, how to think about developing or selling their home. Or how can you keep your house and rent your home. You have a portfolio and long-term legacy and trust for your family. Not just focused on a pot of money now but pass onto generational wealth.
    b. They have a team at FCBC who focuses on economic injustice- educate your congregation. Yes from the pulpit you need to say the community is changing, don't sell grandma's house, don't make emotional/decisions. An aspect of economic injustice is when people are not informed.
6. What resources would be helpful for Black congregations in particular to reimagine ministry in a changing world/society?
    a. We have to ask professionals in our field who can supply these resources.
    b. Town Halls at our churches with civic officials to talk about gentrification and changes in the neighborhood. Have them help you educate your congregation. They have a duty to help. (personal meeting on resources that are available)
    c. Partnering with other churches! Pastors have to work together. The Kingdom works together. Pastors should be aiding each other. Reach out to other churches that have various resources. Churches should be partnering well together.
    d. Reach out to congregants who are politically savvy, business savvy who can help educated congregations on these issues.
7. Given what we've been talking about, are there any questions you wish I had asked, but didn't?
8. Education and information- we can't blame the government, advocacy with city government and officials. Will our people get jobs? Job training and making sure we aren't being pushed out and overlooked. Working with groups like So-Fi, Clippers, etc. how can they invest and help our community. We have to have a voice in our community/ advocacy

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